WIND-HARPS

MARION CRAN

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WIND-HARPS

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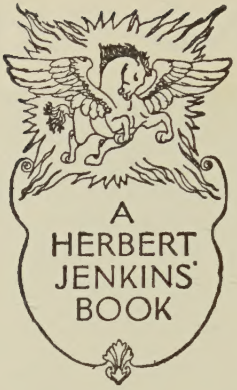
Portrait Study—Olga Baswitz.

"I DON'T CARE : I HAVE SECRETS."

WIND-HARPS

BY
MARION CRAN
AUTHOR OF "THE GARDEN OF IGNORANCE,"
"THE STORY OF MY RUIN," "THE JOY OF THE GROUND,"
ETC. ETC.

HERBERT JENKINS LIMITED
3 YORK STREET, ST. JAMES'S
LONDON S.W. 1



First printing 1929

MADE AND PRINTED IN GREAT BRITAIN BY PURNELL AND SONS
PAULTON (SOMERSET) AND LONDON

To

"BOB" AND ANNA DUDLEY,

THE BIG BROTHER

AND

HIS YOUNG WIFE

INTRODUCTION

SOME people still have ears for the little musics of the garden. They have not lost their hearing in the roar and bustle of these machine-harried days. They know how to listen for the voices of swallows, of frogs, of robins; for the chuckle of the nesting moor-hen; the shrill note of the bats at dusk, and the deep melodious labour-song of bees in time of honey-flow and pollen-tide.

These are they who can most often hear, too, the many musics in the home . . . where all the real adventures of life are found.

Musics of temperament, personality, and character in lesser creatures.

I am calling those signs, those noises, those gestures, those with-holdings, those tempers, those caresses which flow to us so freely from them "musics." Rabindranath Tagore, in "The Gardener," calls them boundaries of recognition. It is the same. I will quote his lovely passage:

"I often wonder where lie hidden the boundaries of recognition between man and the beast whose heart knows no spoken language. Through what primal paradise in a remote morning of creation

ran the simple path by which their hearts visited one another. Those marks of their constant tread have not been effaced tho' their kinship has been long forgotten. Yet, suddenly in some worldless music the dim memory wakes up and the beast gazes into the man's face with a tender trust, and the man looks down into its eyes with amused affection. It seems that the two friends meet masked, and vaguely know each other through the disguise."

People who love animals, *all* animals, deeply, will know those moments of half-guessed recognition, will have talked in the unspoken language, and they will not be vexed (as some profess to be) because I do not call this a garden book seeing it does not say "now is the time to plant"—or—"thus and thus should we prune,"—they will understand why I call it Wind-Harps; and why, to me, this is as truly a garden-book as any I have ever written.

MARION CRAN.

May, 1929.

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CHAPTER I

"There's many a magician in Bagdad and Benares
Can read you—for a penny—what your future is to be;
And a flock of crazy prophets just by staring at a crystal
Can fill it with more fancies than there's herrings in the sea;
But *I* know a Wizardry
Can break a freckled egg-shell
And shake a throstle out of it, in every hawthorn tree."

Alfred Noyes.

CHAPTER I

THE SUN-PARLOUR

"THE weeds are growing fast again in that lower pond," I said at lunch, hopefully. But no one took much notice. I was carving ducks, and they are not easy in places, the joints seem to burrow away from the knife; every eye was following the insinuating blade that twisted about seeking a point of severance.

"Very weedy it's growing."

But they didn't care.

Food is very interesting. It makes a music in our lives—or dreadful discord, and sometimes I think we might do better if we took dietetics seriously in England. Food has led me into odd moments sometimes: there was Dick's never-to-be-forgotten curry, and then there was the miner's caviar.

It was up in the Northern Transvaal among the alluvial diggings, not a day's journey from the place where Jock of the Bushveld was killed and buried. On the Rand, away south, massed labour and limitless capital work the gold reef under a

directorate of wealthy Jews, near the luxuries and amusements of cosmopolitan Johannesburg. But up here a tiny scattered population of whites, men of the English public schools and some few wives, live a lonelier way. They own small private gold mines; they assay; they go off prospecting; they shoot, motor, run down to Durban or England now and again, get homesick a bit, but in the main put up a jolly front to the same few faces while they eat the same sort of food year after year.

In the land of many waterfalls, deep ravines, waving grasses, rolling uplands, hot days, cold mornings, and brilliant nights, monotony dogs them, and they fight it with all their courage, with quaint childish ingenious devices, lest the dry-rot of boredom sets in and brings life tumbling about their ears in ruined tempers and nerves.

Visitors are rare, and are counted precious when they come, as I found when I got there once on one of my long questing journeys. Every wayfarer brings a whiff of the outer world, so this bird of passage straight from "the old country" was royally welcomed. They showed me their gold mines, a wavering line of magic sparkling white along the tunnel-side in the rich red earth, the heavy crushers ever thudding, and then a line of black water full of black sand—gold! The mines there have iron pyrites hidden in the gold, yielding a rich by-product of sulphur.

The Lower Pond was getting weedy.

They got up a dance; they took me to the tiny pretty church which they had built with their own money, these men and women of the world—the place where they consecrated the vital things—birth, love, death—their little church to me was touching, as it was also to hear the two or three women of the place asking me about face powders and talking beauty talk, bless them; putting up their fight to preserve their pretty skins in the dry, brilliant African sun.

They took me to their swimming pool in the Drakensburg, where ferns hang over the pool—cool under the shade of the big scarp, its dark surface streaked with foam. They had fitted it up nicely with two spring boards and a ladder, diving down into the clear bronze water and coming up under the spray of the fall.

We went to a gorge to see blue monkeys and found wild agapanthus instead, blue as the bluebells in beech woods at "home"; and we found wild gladioli and lilies. We talked of Esdraelon and Nazareth where some had flown in the war, and of the flowers there—of platinum, of gold miners, but always, yearningly, the tale came back to England, to opera, theatres, restaurants, heather moors and grouse, to books and people, golf and horses, clubs and cities; I spilt all I could of home talk into their thirsting hearts for one or two days, and then I must go on—Basutoland next.

Colonel James declared he would be the one to give me a farewell dinner party; he was a delightful creature. Not Sandhurst, nor the Indian Frontier, nor all his man-of-the-worldness had succeeded in drowning the eternal boy. He beamed as the party gathered at moon-up, unable to keep his secret any longer.

"You shall start off with caviar!" he babbled, and a thrill ran through the party. He had hoarded that tin till it was nearly a legend—the only caviar for hundreds of miles; that precious only tin——

"I say you don't mean that?"

'O! Jimmy!"

"By Jove, you've done it!"

I could feel the solemnity, and pictured the luscious black pearls when that ineffable milky haze spread as the lemon juice drops. Caviar, icy cold; and icy butter—on hard toast! It sounded very grand. I realised this was to be a great banquet, followed by the Colonel's special Mocha!

When the black boy brought in a hot slimy mess on a dish I saw our host go quite white, and incredulous rage leap into his eyes. The native cook had fried Jimmy's caviar in butter and put it on toast. It had a strange smell. There was a dreadful stillness round the table; and then I rushed in where angels fear—I could not bear that awful silence.

"You *are* up to date!" I said and told stories about the new Russian mode (!) Of the finest palates demanding their sturgeon-roe cooked; of the preference at fashionable night-clubs; of the fried delicacy at Lord Mayor's banquets. I talked with the tongue of angels, never so eloquent. I stirred them all up so that they almost began to believe me.

But we sensibly took delicate helpings. It was like hot fish-glue, revolting in texture and nauseous in taste.

"Delicious!" I chanted; and then made my awful mistake. When the black boy offered me a second helping I *took it* under those wondering eyes.

And crowned this effort by an ignominious (and imperative) bolt from the table.

It was three or four years ago that had happened, but I can remember the ignominy to this moment; time swam back, I was on the other side of the world—and then someone asked for more duck and I recalled the pond.

"It's getting full of ferny stuff" I said; "it wants pulling up by the roots. I did a lot before breakfast, the water's quite warm."

Dick took pity.

"If you lend me a bathing dress I'll go in presently," he said, "but what I would really like is a sun-bath."

"That's all right," I said, "you can go into the field after, a long way away; there will only be cows to see you."

We found Dick a black silk bathing suit, but it was of female design, and flopped absurdly about his slender form; he went off to the pond where the fish must have fled before the long legs and flail-like arms pulling up sheaves of green weed and throwing them on the bank.

I watched him awhile thinking of a garden which I have never seen, yet to which I am taken sometimes by a young woman who describes it to me; she is not in my sense of the word truly a gardener, but the feature she remembers in a garden she once saw is so clearly etched upon her memory that she creates it, living, before my eyes as she talks, and I walk in it with her.

"It was a sun-parlour," she says; "the green walls were thick and high; it was perfectly secluded, perfectly private—we used to have sun-baths there."

She would speak as a homesick traveller speaks of his distant land, with a wistfulness, her hands folded on the great desk in a dim London office. "We had sun-baths there."

Another time she told me more about that green room in a garden. "There was a jet of water in a basin in the middle, and we could have shower-baths after tennis. . . ."

It seemed to me that nothing could be more delightful than to lie at somnolent ease in a sun-room under the blue sky, with a spray of silver water sparkling near, and the song of the birds for company.

The mere act of baring the whole body to the sun is refreshment—our too-white skin, sodden with indoor life, with shadows, with darkness, with clothes—soaks up the good rich sun as a thirsty land soaks rain after drought. Body and mind, nerve and tissue, expand and thrill with new life after a sun-bath. It is amazing to realise, as we think of that primitive body-need of the human race, how far we have withdrawn within walls and coverings, how hard it is to find a chance of doing that simplest act of all—to bare our bodies to the sun with all of healing and of strength that it means.

Certain leisured or wealthy folk can go to the Lido, to Palm Beach, or to remote and rather "precious" Alpine resorts for sun-holidays, but to the great majority of people these places are as inaccessible as Mars; yet the sun shines impartially on rich and poor alike, and since I heard about a sun-parlour in a garden I have thought a great deal about how easy it would be to make our gardens lovelier and more welcome yet to our friends and guests by a very simple act of planting green turf and hedge walls.

The entrance could be on the lines of those used at the wings of open-air theatres. An outer hedge, an opening, an inner blind of hedge-material the same as the surround, a carpet of green grass, a fine jet of water from a central basin, and there is the perfect sun-parlour and garden shower bath.

It will be argued that yew hedges six feet high take some time to grow; and so they do, and they and holly last a long time—for generations. The walls need not always be of yew. It would be easy to put a surround of woven wattle fencing, which can be made to any height, and to plant the green hedge inside the shelter of it, choosing materials which grow densely, but more quickly than yew or holly. Yet what can beat a close green hedge of either?

I know a man who collects old furniture made of yew-wood; it is very scarce, naturally, as growth is so slow; but the iron hardness of it and the golden colour stained with great brown marblings under a brilliant polish, make it the most attractive and distinguished medium of any I have ever seen. I once met a couple of people who felled an immense yew-tree on their estate and *burned* it! A piece of vandalism to break a cabinet-maker's heart.

To come back to the sun-parlour idea. The soil on the line of the surround, whether it is to be a circle, a square or some more elaborate design, cannot be too well treated before the planting of

the green wall—so as to make sure the young hedge will make free, quick, strong growth. It should be broken up to the width of a yard and dug deeply and thoroughly to a depth of two spits or more to give the plants a free root run.

If hornbeam or beech or privet or hawthorn is chosen it should go in double rows about eight inches apart. The plants placed in alternate rhythms, about ten inches from plant to plant in each row. Beech and hornbeam might be given two or three inches more space in each direction.

Jock disturbed these reflections by first catching a mole and then running up and down the lawn with it, letting it go and catching it again in a most revolting way, just as he had watched Sibo do with mice; I think that dog has lived with cats too much.

Having tired of the mole because it was now dead, he conceived the idea that the truncated apparition in the pond was the body of a stranger, and started rushing round the banks barking furiously, threatening black murder every time Dick waded inshore to throw a stack of greenery on land; once he saw an agile newt scrambling out of a lump of weeds, and forgot Dick for a moment while he sniffed at it with puzzled curiosity.

It was a large newt with a yellow belly, and it ran quite quickly over the lawn and back into the

water. Satisfied that he had lost it Jock turned back to his watchdog business, and I picked my way carefully over the flat stones by the study window to have a look at the bells upon the rocks before I must go in and settle down to the abhorred pen. I have no real rock garden, but in one nice sunny place I grow some of the dear little Alpines among flat stones because I love them.

The Alpine plants seem to have a charm which binds our hearts more closely than even gorgeous herbaceous border or lordly shrubbery. The tiny flowers nestle into little cradles of sweet soil which we have made for them among the stones; intimate, appealing; they look up, laughing, into our faces as we bend over them, learning their loveliness feature by feature over again.

Fairy "Maiden" pinks, blushing rose-red six inches high; Alpine catchfly; green sandwort set with white flowers on stems as delicate as an eye-lash; the heartsease of the rocks, Grecian pansies of deepest Tyrian purple, compact and evergreen, with their sweet violet-scent; and brilliant sun-roses, sticky campions, blue gentianella, summer starwort, woodruff, rosy thrifts set in green cushions —and the wonderful bewildering bell-flowers which are more various and generous than all. Just when the wonder of the spring rock-garden is beginning to fade—when the bulbs, the purple carpets of aubretia and the gleaming snows of arabis

Where the Bell Flowers grow.

are passing over—we find the blue and white bell-flowers coming gallantly into bloom.

The number in choice is confusing for those who have no acquaintance with the family. I knew an amateur who once saw the handsome spikes of Campanula Persicifolia Telham Beauty somewhere, and fell in love with its large bells of soft lavender blue; he wanted them for his border. He did not know enough of the genus to take special note of the variety, and so mixed the names up. But when he looked for the tall stems in due season he found they were not to be seen; a riotous mass of lovely little violet bells scrambling industriously around his feet did not connect itself at all in his mind with the bell-flower order he had written last autumn. He looked aloft and mourned his missing Telham Beauty, blaming the nurseryman. But he, poor soul, having been asked for C. Muralis, had done his bit honestly—and so had the flowers, which took kindly to their new owner's good soil, so far from their native Dalmatia; and had responded generously, not to say extravagantly, to his careful planting.

The bell-flowers have been labelled hideously by the botanists, who have a most infuriating habit of puzzling and boring the public by altering the Latin names after the unlettered have laboriously committed them to memory; there will be those, it will be discovered, who call this good-hearted

bell-flower, "Muralis," by the ponderous name of Campanula Portenschlagiana—a discouraging affair!

Muralis creeps over the stones in a perfect flood of violet bells about six inches high. Of a much more luminous tone is the exquisite little bell-flower, rather like a tiny harebell, C. Pusilla Miss Willmot—which grows very freely, and covers the ground with soft silvery masses. There is a beautiful new species from the Isles of Greece, called C. Laurii, which smothers its leaves in upturned flowers of rosy lavender—it is quite hardy, and grows nine inches high.

A variety I seldom see, but have greatly admired, is C. Turbinata, which has a wide blue cup borne close to the ground.

I brooded over the warm stones, thinking how easy these little bell-flowers really are to grow; they like ordinary well drained soil, are fond of a moraine in the rock-garden if they can get it, and are better for partial shade. They almost invariably need lime, and are really very good-hearted plants, accommodating themselves readily to crevices in the stones, or to banks.

And just then I found Dick had got his sun-bath after all. There was a great noise by the pond and a flurry of dog and man; Dick tried to persuade Jock that he was his friend, but Jock did not care for his appearance, and flew at him, snapping

and barking. Suddenly there was a long tearing sound and Jock, like Mrs. Potiphar, was left with the garment. He danced with rage, snarling and tearing the borrowed bathing suit to bits. Dick fled with incredible speed down the garden, toward the tool shed.

CHAPTER II

" Listen to the wind;
Man has not learnt to measure
The wind of his thought."

Amy Lowell.

CHAPTER II

A GLASS OF RED WINE

FAR below lay the great dark forest, mile on mile of black pine tops ringed round with mountains, threaded far off by the silver streak where flows the famous Rhine. In halls and dungeons of a ruined castle large trees grew unashamed, the sunset light fell softly on roofless chambers and massive walls of richly lichened stone. A wren sought industriously among the leafy litter in a deep dry well filled with a crumbly mould of the dead leaves of centuries.

A small chamber high up in a tower had been turned into a shrine, where the commercial instinct of somebody had evolved some excuse for a "saint," and placed a tawdry effigy behind tinsel and candles, to earn his keep. Except for that ugly spot the old castle was full of dignity and peace. The climb up to it through the forest had been long and severe; I sat in what had evidently been the banquet hall, resting contentedly while it peopled itself in fancy with ladies, warriors, nobles and minstrels. The tops of the pines in the

forest far below billowed gently, a peaceful green sea, in a gathering sunset breeze.

Lost in dreams, I heard again the very sound of music about the emptied halls; from far away, from distant elfland came the sweetest chords, long-drawn, shudderingly sweet. Pale shadowy ladies moved among knights and pages, flames from the great fireplace glowed on tissue of gold and silver, on fine brocades, lovely women and powerful men; the air stirred with their passing. I was absorbed in a congenial reverie, that kind of thinking which I do love, and James Harvey Robinson says is "the last thing to make directly or indirectly for honest increase of knowledge!"

He may be right.

I prefer the kindlier Dimnet's interpretation of those vague pregnant hours poignant and exquisite when inspiration flutters at the threshold of the mind, and a luminant idea can find an open door to come rushing through. The root of creation is an idea. . . .

Music filled the air, thin and sweet at first, and then a bolder note. A deep resonant twanging as if a mailed hand had taken the harp from a love-lorn boy and struck on all the chords with might. Sunset had faded, and the saint began to look bleak and dim in his silly little shrine; a cold wind blew among the encroaching trees in the deserted place; the music grew louder, filling my

Where Wind-harps sing—The old Castle in the Black Forest, looking down on mile on mile of tree-tops.

mortal ears with fearful questioning;—this was too like real sound for peaceful dreams.

Shivering I turned to face the descent into the darkening forest; and then, ashamed, turned back to learn who it might be who played the harp in that deserted hall of ancient warriors and long-dead dames.

A gallery runs round the upper chamber, below the keep, and there I found the faithful minstrel. Across three of the empty windows æolian harps had been fixed between the carved stone mullions, the æolian harp that "wakes no certain air, but overtakes far thought with music that it makes." Fantastic dreamings gave way to keen interest; in the fading light I could see the pinewood framework of the harps which hitherto I had almost believed lived only in fancy; a dozen or so strings were stretched over narrow bridges of a different wood, probably hard wood. The winds would blow obliquely across the strings, causing them to vibrate in aliquot parts; the god and father of the winds was the minstrel in the enchanted banquet hall.

The little winds of dawn and sunset speak sweetly, but the rough gales press out the dissonances of the 11th and 13th overtones in shrill discords. When the fury of the storms die down the music comes through in shuddering, sobbing sweetness; harmonious once again.

I went down the forest paths under the darkling pines upon which mistletoe oddly grows, lost in an old dream. I knew a man once who had a wind-harp; he found it in Caledonian Market, and strung its old frame afresh; sometimes he would put it in a window and let the passing winds make it sing again.

He told me about it at one of our rare meetings, and I only half listened, for the sound of his voice was music enough; I wanted no more than to see him there near by; the fine frame and heavy intellectual face, the weary frustrated face—which held the pain and sweetness of the thing desired and ever unpossessed.

It all came back to me through the drowning years as I trudged down the leafy forest ways in the gathering darkness—he came back young and dear and strong, re-created—at the moment when he told of his wind music.

"You are not interested in my harp?" he had said at last. I met his eyes, and we were silent in the hot, crowded tea-shop. Then he took me to a 'bus, and as we said good-bye suddenly the hot tears broke from my young face and mingled with the cold rain. The sharp pains of youth! So fierce that they can hurt still in the latter years.

I walked on and on, lights began to show far off in the valley below. Soon I should leave the

forest. I turned back to look up once more. It had been ordained that thus I should hear a wind-harp at last—alone; the miles and the years between us. I wondered where he was; and if he still heard sounds from over the hills and far away.

I came down to dinner that night consider-ably late and much excited with my adventure; garrulous, and unregardful of an overcast face opposite.

"What *is* it?" I said at last, pierced by neglect.

"That nice maid has got another place, and we shall have to fall back upon the Varmint."

I was much too excited by the music of the windy mountain top to trouble just then about that hair-shirt of the home, domestic service. Here we were nearing the end of the first real holiday for many a year and my spirits were unquenchable. I had not written a word for three weeks, publishers, public, bank manager, tax-gatherers, home and duty had been cast to the dogs. We had walked the hills and woods of golden "awe-time," seen the thorny pink acacia growing wild; and pictured its beauty in bloom-time hanging in long trusses like Jacaranda flushed into rose; snowball trees in their red October foliage; mistletoe on pine trees; tulip trees, berberis bealii, wistaria scrambling over enormous trees, azaleas, scores of rare and lovely shrubs, and we had climbed up to the Katzesteinn

to find it was a dovecote, a bird-house set on a high hill! We had found the red periwinkle growing in this far wild place, we had adventured into strange tongues and tasted strange food, met strange welcomes and strange courtesies.

We were charged with fresh energies, and despoiled of unnecessary belongings—that is to say I was, for I had cast away a heavy load. There are those who laugh when people get fat. But it is really most uncomfortable; and a bewilderment, too, for one gets confused with all this lumber piled up on the happy body that used to work so easily and freely. A continuous and increasing weight makes everything harder to do.

For years I had toiled away, trying to forget the creeping pounds, but they would not be forgotten. Starving was no good because it tired a weary heart and stopped my working; doctors were vague but friendly with drugs and theories. One bade me drink pints and pints of cold water; and so I did till I grew like a balloon and stopped for sheer discomfort; they filled me with thyroid and digitalis; and bade me rest and lie down, which I detested. The abhorred fat accumulated, till I contemplated gloomily the prospect of rolling into the grave from a mountain of blubber.

The singing daughter was kindness itself, loyally preserving my self-respect in a pickle of kindly flatteries and spiced tenderness. I was exceed-

ing grateful but undeceived. At last I met a doctor who was not practical, being honest, much too honest to snatch my guineas. He sent me to a wizard in a forest, whose name is ever blest.

This man cast away the violent drugs, and bade me walk and bade me eat, bade me drink red wine and white with my food, and lo! the nightmare fat departed. Here I was with my clothes hanging round me in festoons and garlands—a full merry skeleton, restored to strength with a clean bill of health, and the woods cluttered up with the pounds I had lost in them on the long adventurous walks.

"The chemistry of each body is different; you had to learn your own, that is all," said the wizard, whose halls in the forest are sought for all sorts of ills by princes and ambassadors, kings and merchants, philosophers, writers, singers and statesmen from the ends of the earth.

Adorable magician, apostle of common sense, he cures from within the troubled bodies that come to him, and sends them back to the world set upright again upon the path of health.

"Why could not an English doctor do it?" I marvelled to a famous surgeon later on.

"Our people are not interested in dietetics," he said indifferently.

But why not?

"The wind-harps sang at sunset, shall we climb up to-morrow and hear the music again at dawn?" I said, to a cold silence. I perceived I was unpopular. Nobody likes my morning walks.

"It is much more important that I write and prepare the Varmint for our return, I had hoped to give her notice instead," said Lesley.

"She has her points—if only she would not be so good-natured," I reflected.

We were unable to instil any common sense into that woman. She was cast-iron honest; we could leave the home in her charge knowing nothing would budge her a yard from the garden until we came back; that everything would be kept spotless and so on. But never did anyone get so terribly on our nerves. She believed every hard-luck story that was told her, was always in difficulties herself because someone else had to be helped, she over-fed the animals; she overfilled the lamps; she over-cooked the joints; she talked too much; she wept too often; she wore her skirts too long and her eye-brows too thick; she came for a month and stayed too long. She was too much of everything but bulk, and that was meagre.

She was a lady, and we longed for a good common wench who would do what she was told and stay in the kitchen.

"I wonder when we shall get rid of her," said the singing child, in tones of great exasperation. Truly it was aggravating to have missed the nice little maid and have to go back to the Varmint, whose real name was Dinah Lee. She had earned her nick-name by going in to Tenterden (a long 'bus ride) on one of her days out and buying a rabbit for a certain sick ingrate who was very wroth at the would-be Lady Bountiful.

"No call to bring me that 'ere Varmint." The fields and lanes being thick with rabbits the people in my part of Kent regard them, not unjustly, as vermin—the lassie persisted that he meant Dinah—but I still believe he meant the rabbit.

"Catch 'em in my cabbage bed if I wants they," he growled, looking distastefully at his gift.

The people who serve us in our homes have a great power to make us happy or unhappy. This woman always wrung our hearts and destroyed our tempers. She gave me the feeling of something incomplete; as so many lonely spinsters can do.

"It's because she has no one of her own to spend herself on that she splurges herself over everything," I said.

"Well, if loving is giving she would make a good lover," said the girl with the hard laugh of youth.

It made me sorry to hear her; the young bright thing, whom Time will beat and hammer into another shape, do what I may to shield her.

"The hardest part of loving is to know when to stop giving," I said at last.

"Well, we must not take her seriously, Mummy. It's fatal. She is a character, anyway; amusing, when we don't let her upset our peace of mind."

"She makes a certain tone or colour in the fabric of our days, doesn't she?" I ruminated. "It takes all sorts of people to make up that pattern."

The girl reflected.

"Once you said the garden was to you like a bridge," she said, "with the life-stream flowing under it; I think home is like a wind-harp; and life is the wind blowing through it."

"That's a nice idea," I said, "life the wind, pressing out the different noises of the different personalities."

"Yes, that's what I meant," said Lesley;—"but I wonder why you are so thrilled over those harps?"

I could not explain to her. I could not re-create that moment of pain which had come flying back on the sound of the hidden strings to-day. I could only fumble with words and say nothing.

I wonder if my mother had felt like that when I asked about her red wine, that surprising modest tipple. So long ago! I was a gay young fashionable wife in London, and mother came to town for a visit. She would not stay in our noisy, merry house; not at all; she chose a quiet temperance hotel of Christian leanings, and did what she wanted in her own way.

But one night she permitted us to take her to a restaurant to dine.

It was a business. We were to be at the hotel to fetch her at seven—"Don't be late." We were to convey her in a brougham—"I don't like these taxi-cabs." We were not to go where there was a band—"They make my head ache." We were to allow her to choose her own menu—"None of your messes."

I put on my prettiest evening dress to make her proud of me, and we found her all dressed up and waiting; a surprisingly handsome old lady, with a little lace at her throat and wrists, jet ear-rings and an ebony stick—and lavender on a sheer lawn handkerchief. It was only a little lace she wore—but it was real. She was a very proud old dame. With standards.

Everything worked according to plan. The brougham conveyed us—there was no band; we chose a place famous for its chef and its wines, where she proceeded to choose her own menu.

She asked for oysters and a chicken wing and a peach.

"Won't you have some wine?" we asked, of her who drank milk and soda. And she said she would like sparkling Burgundy! I did not even know she knew the name . . . *sparkling Burgundy.*

"Why do you want that?" I asked, enchanted at the surprise, but deploring her taste.

"I had it once long ago."

"With father?" I said perfunctorily while we signalled for the wine list.

"No, before I met your father; I was engaged to a doctor then."

That was all I ever knew. It must have been so respectable in those unemancipated Victorian days. I wonder how she ever had the chance to sip wine with the young doctor; under the eyes of her people it must have been. Her rose cheek would have flushed, her grey eyes sparkled; the rich russet brown curls must have shaken when she turned her head and laughed. Such a skin! Till her death it was smooth as silk and creamy as ivory. My funny old mother. Well, there it was . . . another man was our father. Why? He was a very dear father to us and she loved him passionately. Did he cut the wine-bibbing doctor out? We never knew.

But once in her widowed age my mother drank sparkling Burgundy with a memory in her eyes. The

memory of another than our father. So when Lesley asked about the wind-harps I could say nothing. But they had brought back the feel of hot tears and cold rain on my face.

Perhaps all mothers have a glass of red wine hidden from their daughters.

CHAPTER III

"Song of Apple-trees, honeysweet and murmurous,
Where the swallows flash and shimmer a sthey thrid the foam-white maze,
Breaths of far-off Avalon are blown to us, come down to us,
Avalon of the Heart's Desire, Avalon of the Hidden Ways!"

"Song of Apple-blossom, when the myriad leaves are gleaming
Like undersides of small green waves in foam of shallow seas,
One may dream of Avalon, lie dreaming, dreaming, dreaming,
Till wandering through dim vales of dusk the stars hang in the trees."

Fiona Macleod.

CHAPTER III

THE OLD APPLE-TREE

THE old apple-tree was burning up in sharp spurts of yellow and silver. Just before Christmas a gale blew—the greatest gale the land had known for nearly a century; blocking the high roads with fallen trees, killing people, stripping roofs, over-turning cars, and my ancient house stood up to it; whining queer witch-wife laughter among the old rafters, and shrieking now and again demoniac joy at the fury of the elements which found it standing still unbeaten, after six hundred years. It was a mad night; we sat within our walls wondering at the violence of the storm, and its murderous roar as it came threshing across the fields to this lonely house.

In the morning we found the wattle rose-garden all strewn about, and one of the dear old apple-trees which carried the hammocks bodily uprooted. We were very grieved to see it lying there, for it was a gallant old tree, and we had grown used to living with it; we liked watching the birds which built in the holes in its trunk. We kept all

the wood of it carefully for the Yule-tide fires, and now here it was passing from our keeping in a blaze of splendour, in beautiful apple-wood fires.

Clear towers of flame spurted up, silver flames shot with rose and lemon; the wood, full of its hoarded summer riches, sizzled and burst into its last glory, yielding up in a final passionate giving the sweet oils of the fat bloom buds. Big logs from the trunk and branches were piled on the mighty hearth, burning with a steady noise like the sea—the flames stretched up against the black cavern like slim golden bodies dancing in silver tulle to the sound of a distant sea.

I looked sorrowfully at the grey lichened bark and the fruitful buds. They would burst no more in a cloud of rose against the blue April sky; swing us no more beneath the boughs through lazy mid-summer moons, when the garden is dewy and full of sleeping roses. But it did not pass unre-garded, and its ashes have gone back to the garden to enrich it with the potash that young growing things adore.

Jock sat blinking drowsily and Lesley, his mistress, the singing daughter, pushed an industrious hook to and fro through the canvas of a marvellous mat, vowed for a New Year present; it was to go by my bed, warm to jump out on of a cold morning. She looked pretty, sitting there so absorbed in the

candlelight surrounded by little hillocks of brightly-coloured wools. In the corner was a great Christmas-tree hung with parcels and silver tinsel, with golden crackers and shining balls. A silver star glittered at the top, and among the lower boughs were spun a couple of cobwebs cunningly made with silver thread. They said it had taken a whole evening to make those cobwebs, but whether it really took so long I cannot truly tell, I did not wait to see. They were pretty cobwebs, and very convincing, spun from the dark fir boughs, glistening bravely in the apple-tree fire-light.

I do not know the name of the apple our tree had borne; it was a very old kind; the fruit had a golden colour with rosy cheeks, it ripened early, with a sharp flavour infinitely refreshing on a hot day in early autumn, and it cooked well. It had been a good giving tree in its rose and gold harvest time.

I sat and looked at the room, thinking of Christmas Day and wondering how my girl would like the gifts I had tied up on the tree for her—remembering other Christmas Days in the old Surrey home and the game we used to play telling fortunes "by fire on water." The same old grandfather clock caught the dancing flames now as then, and the brass and copper warming pans, but some faces were missing——

We have a convention in our home for Christmas Day; it was evolved originally long, long ago by my mother when she had to contrive craftily to keep five noisy, exuberant youngsters amused all that day—lest the delirious excitement of "presents" should tire young, highly-strung nerves and end the day in quarrels and disgraceful tears. So we always found Santa Claus' stocking by our pillows at daybreak, and they kept us mightily busy untying knots with our little clumsy, chilblained fingers till breakfast and family prayers; then church all the morning, with a good walk and loud lusty hymns to carry off a further amount of energy, followed by an enormous Christmas dinner which clogged activity for another hour or two, and then, but not till then, were our parcels opened. The result was that her brood was kept simmering with hope till nearly tea-time; and, after that, the excitement of playing with new toys kept it placid and happy till bedtime. And so she got through the perilous Christmas Day. Poor mother!

As a family, far scattered across the Empire, we still preserve that ancient order; in London, in Kent, in Canada, in Nyasaland, in New Zealand, we keep the pattern of mother's Christmas Day because it was a very good one.

There was one parcel not hung up on the tree this year because it had arrived from a nursery

wrapped in straw—and I had already planted the contents—two weeping willow trees to grow beside the ponds. It was nice to feel their little toes were comfortably in the damp soil sucking up the oozy moisture they love. I pictured them in years to come bending gracefully over the water, reminding us of the way the willows grow in Holland among the tulip gardens, where the giver and I had admired them together.

The first time I received a plant for a Christmas present, "we were not amused," in the classic phrase. The parcel was hung upon the tree with all the other gifts as usual, it had been prodded and eyed and guessed about with the customary thrill of wonder, and when its turn came to be untied, amid a hush of curiosity and excitement, some dark-green pansy leaves and damp mould had a rather dowdy, almost depressing effect among the gaudily coloured cards, scarves, bottles of perfume, brilliantly upholstered toilet soaps, filmy stockings, books, etc., which made up the rest of my pile.

That parcel was received with peaceful but not ecstatic appreciation. There was a card with it bearing the name of a friend in New Brunswick whom we all loved, and also the words "*Pansies for thoughts they say—keep mine.*" The parcel had been sent from a famous pansy nursery; I put it away, thinking I must heel the plants in; I

felt most remote from gardening in a flimsy gay crackercap and all!

But presently we were gorged with untying parcels, with laughter, with the hot fire, with good fare; some started dancing, some went for a walk, and I also grew energetic. The short winter day was closing in, but just before the light went I managed to plant the pansies in a clean border where was nothing else but tulips, under the study window.

Christmas passed, and a New Year hurried after it, the months raced on, the books were all read, the perfumes used, the stockings worn to ladders, the gaudy cards littered the mantelpieces and desks till they were collected at last and burned. All the pretty presents came to an end and were forgotten—except the pansies; they grew and spread and broke into sheets of clear blue colour; they caught the eye of all who passed the study window, and pleased everyone. The "thoughts" of our friend! In time they were multiplied and absorbed into the garden scheme; they made a lovely edging to a small formal garden planted with London Pride which glowed in a rosy mist over the blue at time of its flowering.

That Christmas card of all the years ago is with me still; I brought some to Kent and here in this new garden are cuttings of the old plants. Through every change of circumstance that living greeting

has made a sweetness round my home. Once our friend came back from her distant country across the long waterways and smiled to see the blue carpets and borders.

"It was a sweet Christmas card," I said; "the colour is so full of tone; it's like music among the other flowers."

She put her arm in mine.

"And she shall have music wherever she goes," she laughed lightly.

And so I have! Music in many unexpected ways —in silences and withholdings; in bird and beast and man; in the ground beneath as well as the stars above; in colour and form; in space; in friendships; in the uprising and going down of the sun. Much music.

It was a very charming idea to send a living token of remembrance like that! When another such gift came our way, as it did some four or five years later, we were all very pleased, and reckoned it more highly than any other of the parcels; this time it was a robinia hispida, a lanky, thorny plant labelled "*from my garden to yours.*" I was told to put it full south, by one of the verandah pillars.

It turned out to be a very pretty shrub, with leaves like acacia and flowers like pink laburnum; it throve exceeding well, and still does, I believe, on that house; for I did not move it when I moved,

as it seemed happy and well established. I have seen it now at last growing wild, in that great forest where the wizard lives—upon a valley slope where growth is almost sub-tropical amid the thermal springs.

Last year found me presented with a plant of Allspice (Chimonanthus fragrans) which is settling slowly into the new soil after its leisurely habit; it will soon begin to grow quietly, year by year, giving us in the bitter winter weather those sweetly scented spikes of starry cream-coloured flowers, with their dark pointing lines. A darling Christmas card, which calls to my mind every time I see it, the warm beauty of the giver.

That the idea is capable of becoming a nuisance if adopted wholesale by people who know nothing of gardens I am well aware. But it is also capable of delightful variations, and pretty subtleties at the hand of thoughtful people with taste who know the garden to which they send their gifts. It would be no kindness to order a rhododendron present for the friends who live on chalk downs or lavender for those on damp heavy clay! Alpines are nearly always safe, for most people have a rockery.

Some nurserymen sell those adorable little "sink gardens" planted with tiny primulas, daffodils, gentians, harebells—carpets of minute creeping

thyme, blue-grey Cheddar pinks, with tiny rose-coloured, rose-scented flowers, auriculas, poppies, St. John's wort, conifers—all sorts of exquisite miniatures of the garden flowers, so fine and perfect that the "sink garden" looks like a thing out of fairy-land. It is really, of course, a rugged stone trough made into a dainty perfect little garden, which one mounts on the rockery or outside a window on a couple of small easily made piers, or on the coping of a low wall; and there it stays summer and winter, for Alpine plants need no protection.

A present of a "sink" garden is rather a majestic affair, as they are so beautiful that many people want them and the price is high. However, with all the nurserymen's catalogues to consult, it is easy to find a suitable plant within the reach of every purse, and to choose things which have a special meaning.

A rose no one could help being glad to get is Prosperity! It is a hybrid musk; which means it dislikes pruning; it sends up strong shoots about four feet high covered with large sprays of fragrant pink blooms that open pure white; and it keeps in bloom from early summer till the winter frosts. The wood and foliage are ruddy bronze when young, and it is a very hardy, delightful variety, good to make into rose-hedges.

Forget-me-nots are pretty, sentimental plants to send; violets will only grow well with people who love them; balm is for comfort, and bryony is a "furious martial herb" which might suit a few folk. There is a dark purple lupin called "Happiness" which makes a graceful gift; but the opportunities for expression are endless, and between friends the choice of a certain flower will often convey a whole message to which the rest of the world is deaf.

I sat idly, dreaming on in the apple-tree firelight —the softly coloured heaps of wool were dwindling under my girl's busy fingers, the dog lay stretched out to the full warmth, his stocky little legs absurdly uplifted, and big domed head prone in a placid ecstasy. The Trollop sat licking her paws and bedizening her whiskers apparently for another love affair; there was that in her unusually restless glances and more than bold voice which seemed ominous.

"We must shut that minx up to-night," I reflected. A marriage must be arranged between her and a royal lord, it was time she was lawfully wedded; twice she had escaped into the lanes and byways and found low-born fathers for dreadful mongrel babes. It must not happen again.

Beside her sat little Sibo, his sable toes together and dark slim tail neatly coiled round them, a princely soul enslaved; the pale cream body poised

with exquisite grace and delicacy, the violet eyes fixed on me with the look of ageless wisdom which seems to belong peculiarly to the foreign breeds; there is all the mystery of the East in that gaze. It is a look which can become very sly and shrewd in an unhappy or badly treated cat.

Sibo glanced at the Trollop and then turned back to me that steady stare—as if he would signal his awareness and his indifference. I offered him my lap, and he came up to it with a sigh of content.

"There are twenty buds on the viburnum Carlesii," I said, letting my fingers pass luxuriantly along the close fine fur.

Nobody cared.

The Varmint was making spicy smells in the kitchen, over something she called mulled claret. Too sweet for my taste. But the others sniffed ecstatically.

I looked round the room and took a deep draught of gladness in my imperfect home. We express ourselves in our homes. But that does not necessarily mean we are entirely content with them, for we may not be perfectly pleased with the self that they expound! For long, long years I lived, perforce, in houses that were not of my seeking, and when at last I came to the hour of free choice I searched high and low for one single dear ideal.

A long, low, ancient frame of oak and plaster, a roof of handmade tiles, golden and purple and grey

with age, a spacious hearth on which oak logs would burn under a great chimney built straight and wide to the stars, heavy oak rafters—a small house and simple, but rich in interest and personality.

An old English black-and-white house—that was what I looked for. I knew exactly what I wanted and I found it, and have loved and lived in it ever since; an old, old house of the Weald, built in 1320. It is very beautiful, and dear to me.

But because of some grossness in my soul I cannot make my home perfect. I find myself accumulating things; where I prefer clear spaces there are things; I encumber myself with the vulgarity of possessions. Books, brasses, pictures, music in various (often untidy) manifestations; china, useless ornamental stuff. Toby jugs and things like that, too many chairs and tables, grandfather clocks not always in going order, and again books: and yet again books: and again more books—there are too many things in my house, and I do not like clearing them out because they one and all tell me some story.

Possessions are the trail-rope to the soaring spirit, tying that to earth which would break away and breast the upper airs of pure thought. My house shows me to myself a groundling, and I do not know what shall set me free.

The apple-buds were burned away, the soft grey bark of the big logs a glowing heart of red—the sound of the busy hook went flip-flop through the canvas and the night gathered close and cold over the Weald.

CHAPTER IV

"How do the blackbird, and thrassel, with their melodious voices bid welcome to the cheerful spring, as in their fixed months they warble forth such ditties as no art or instrument can reach to!

Nay, the smaller birds also do the like in their particular seasons, as namely the laverock, the titlark, the little linnet, and the honest robin, that loves mankind both alive and dead.

But the nightingale, another of my airy creatures, breathes such sweet loud music out of her little instrumental throat that it might make mankind to think miracles had not ceased."

Izaak Walton
(The Compleat Angler).

CHAPTER IV

THE MAID OF THE MORN

THE Weald is the forest of Anderida. When I say to people that I live in the Weald and they say "What is that?" I do not explain, I refer them to a book by one Harvey Darton, called *A Parcel of Kent*, where on page 146 he sets forth the glory of Anderida.

"These extraordinary oaks," he says, "to pass through whose avenues in a brightly lit motor car by night is an education in the meaning of darkness, are the Weald . . . because of that reverend tree, the Weald fed swine for a thousand years. Because of it, also, the Weald did not, for a great time, suffer an urban civilization. The tree-built houses that have stood for six hundred years or so, churches set up to worship a Christ different from to-day's, barns for their eternal purpose to all eternity."

Then he tells of how they made charcoal and smelted iron in the oaken furnaces, and of how that also passed.

"But," he goes on, "it is in wood that the Kentish, like the Sussex, domestic architecture is best

expressed. The curly lanes of the Weald will take you round a preposterous corner, fringed by the twelve-foot hedges, and you will suddenly come upon what is called a half-timbered house, usually of the most exquisite black-and-white loveliness. I say 'called,' because it is not till you see the skeleton of such a house stripped almost to its bare wooden bones that you realize it is about seven-eighths timbered. Behind the plaster between the beams are usually laths—wood. The structure could not hold together, much less stand up, without wood.

"But the interesting thing about these gracious houses is their humanity. In a sense, they are cut to a pattern: that is to say, all later men imitated or were inspired by the first builder of them, an unknown shade who wrought simply to build a plain shelter, and so wrought well. But when you look at the wood closely, you see the builder. The adze marks are still there: the very places where he shaped the oak or chestnut to his particular use: his curves, his joists, the very cut of the shining steel on the then damp wood."

I have quoted more than I meant to; I never can lay that book down quickly when I open a page. To me it speaks with a living voice, it is my "dear acquaintance," for I live among those mighty oaks, in one of the same old houses he here describes; the adze marks are on the wood of it, the crafts-

THE INTERESTING THING ABOUT THESE GRACIOUS OLD HOUSES IS THEIR HUMANITY.

man's signature on beams and rafters—the builder of my house, though six hundred years gone, is not dead. He lives in his work in my beloved house, and I am daily conscious of him and grateful to him. I look up at the kingpost, "that beautiful flower in wood which differs from another as a star in glory," and I thank the "unknown shade" with whom I live.

This, my wind-harp, set where the life-breezes blow through to make me so many musics, is a beautiful instrument with a glorious frame; rough and simple and wholly acceptable.

The Weald is the Forest of Anderida.

Birds live in the boughs of the great oaks which once dropped bountiful acorns down to the feasting swine; they seem to have an idea my house is itself a tree for they cluster about it through all the seasons, but especially when the bird table is filled with winter's fare for them. I love the wild birds best of all; I cannot endure that anything in my care should be deprived of liberty, even the pigeons we grow for table use fly free, and the squabs are taken before they ever learn to fly. The old birds are amusing creatures to have about the home, much absorbed in domesticity and liable to become embarrassingly tame; they often make stories for us, because they are monogamous birds with a great capacity for passion, and the happenings in the pigeon loft reflect gloom or

joy upon us who live near them and observe them closely.

The most satisfying story was that of the bereaved gallant.

He was a very handsome fellow; the brilliance of his red-brown eye was not to be surpassed, nor the pride of his carriage when he caught the maiden's glance. She would be out and about, trim and neat, at the first glance of dawn in the east, footing it prettily to the lawns, with the air of an innocent about her lawful occasions, but looking from side to side for those pursuing feet and listening with all her might for the sweet sound of his coming. When he came she ran affrighted; there was that in his manner which shot her to the heart with a delicious mortal terror. She could feel at the sight of him that menace which is the enticement of the male. Normal and passionate female, she trembled and fled, and longed to be caught.

One day the good-looking fellow found an empty flat; a commodious, two-roomed dwelling, high and dry, facing the sun and beautifully clean; he was taken with the place, it gave him ideas; he went in and out of it, lingering each time to consider what this strange feeling was that had plucked at his idle, swaggering heart.

He went in and out so often, stood about in it so much, felt the sun strike so warmly within,

learned its nooks and corners so thoroughly, that he began to feel it belonged to him. He decided to get a few sticks and settle in; but there was this feeling, this peculiar tugging at the heartstrings, this need of something more, that had invaded the peace of his mind.

He went out on the doorstep and looked about considering the matter. There, wandering restlessly up and down the banks of a lily-pool, watching his every expression and desperately aware of what this discovery of a house was going to do to his future, walked the maid of the morning. At the sight of her he was happy.

"Come and see my house, see my house," he sang out; and she flew to his side. In and out and round and about they wandered, she admiring, he displaying.

It was a wonderful day, full of excitements; they had hardly time to eat because of his obsession with the house. Every time she started to go, a trifle faint with hunger and with thirst, he would call her back and begin all over again; something wonderful had happened in his life, and he did not quite know what it was or where the next step would take him, but something there was that must happen, and it had to do with this adorable little dwelling. He cooed a soft song to the maiden, prancing before her on his slim red legs.

At breakfast next morning I was full of gossip about the way the buds on viburnum Carlesii were swelling.

"They are beginning to show a pinkishness," I said affably, pouring out coffee for the sleepy-eyed, hard-working week-end guests who come down to this quiet house lost in its green pastures, to refresh tired nerves and bodies when the fancy takes them.

"You and your viburnums," said Tods. "What are they?"

"Snowball trees," I said, pleased to get a spark at last. "The moorhens love that viburnum Plicatum near the big pond; every morning in May I find little snowballs strewn on the lawns after their visits."

"The thriftless hens. I don't wonder with a name like that. Placate 'em! Enough to annoy anyone."

Tods is very dear to us. There came a blight and a wind out of the East when Tods was growing up; so we are careful of his frail body; and warm ourselves by his great heart. Sometimes he goes to the music room, where the kingpost is and the high raftered ceiling, and there he plays among the shadows till my pencil drops and I desert the desk to go up there and idle away a delicious hour.

"Don't be cross so early, Tods," said Lesley.

"What else is out, Mummy? May I have the toast, please?"

"The daphnes are in bud," I babbled, and then saw them all laughing.

I don't care: I have secrets. I have planted another kind of viburnum, and they don't even know where it is.

In a moist half-shady place there are now three bushes of viburnum Davidii where it is going to grow very prettily in an obstinate kind of spreading way, never more than two feet in height. People hardly ever take any notice of it in the summer when it bears rather dull, almost foolish white flowers, but when they see it in the autumn, jewelled with torquoise blue berries they are very astonished, and never dream that they are admiring the despised, dull-flowered tree of June. It is a queer little evergreen, full of affections and longings; it gets homesick without some others of its kind nearby, and bears a great many more of its lovely jewel berries if it has spent the summer in a large and jocund company of relations.

It is not my fault that botanists give these ugly names to flowers. "Guelder-rose" is what the village people call the common variety. Most of us know it well, tossing its white balls in the swinging breezes of cuckoo time; we know its pretty green cut leaves, its sturdy shoots of young wood

and gleaming snowballs playing in the wind against the deep blue sky of an English spring, they make a picture which is part of the country lanes and the cottage gardens, part of this ancient lovely Island, where it yet remains unspoiled by great bare new roads and thronging motor traffic.

But not many people trouble to plant the rarer "snowballs" I notice; so they miss a great deal of interest and of variety. There is V. macrocephalum, which bears the hugest snowy balls of all.

"I believe you are still brooding over that plant," said Tods, glowering through his glasses. "Any news in the post?"

"Yes, I've got to go to London—I'll be back to-night."

"Oh! dear," said the singing daughter, "and here is a letter from someone called Bentley asking for two unrelated breeding pairs of pigeons 'at once.'"

"Do you think you can pick them out and send them off, darling," I said. "I've got to get that early train."

She said she could and went down to the pigeon house later on with a measure of corn pleased with the job. She loved the beautiful birds, and was always glad when an order came for live breeding stock. The baskets of squabs which we occasionally send to friends, are Tom's the postman's business—

he it is who wrings their necks and prepares them for table, proud of the delicate quality of the flesh, fine and buttery. That is his job, and he knows just exactly when to take the squabs, at the moment when the parent birds are about to push them into the world to fend for themselves, because they want to sit on a new brace of eggs.

It is then, before the young squabs fly, that Tom takes them into his dreadful mercy; before they know the tremors of first flight; before they have learned the trouble of feeding themselves and wasting away for weeks in the effort, as adolescent pigeons do, when first thrust from the nest; before they have suffered the pangs of jealousy and astonishment at the sight of their parents devoted to another brace of babes; before they take to courtship and fighting and all the emotional stress of the temperamental adult bird-life.

The girl was aware of the halcyon life of Tom's squabs, lapped in love every hour of their short lives, fed and warmed, never a hand's turn of work to do, just lounging and feeding and sleeping till they slip into the dark, in one second, without knowing it; but all the same the live blood in her rejoiced when orders came for breeding pairs, and she knew that some of our new squabs would be allowed to live and come out into the struggling workaday world, to replace those which had been sold from the parent flock.

She went off to the pigeon house to scatter corn; at the first sight of her the air was dark with fluttering wings; and, as the grain fell, the ground round her feet became a moving carpet of rich, dark red bodies dancing on slender scarlet legs, an iridescence of bronze, carmine, and purple on each lively neck and breast.

At the door of an empty nest-box overhead the pretty maid of the morning hesitated, eyeing longingly the corn on the ground; she was very hungry. The beguiling lover had flown away full of importance and oblivious of food, to get some sticks; the house had to be furnished; he had realised that must be the next step in life, and gone away all of a hurry, admonishing her to wait for him.

She fidgeted about a moment longer, and then flew down to join the flock; millet, and hemp, sunflower seeds, Canadian peas, wheat and maize were disappearing rapidly into every crop but her own;—dear life, how empty her poor little crop was! She must feed.

Tods stood watching while Lesley picked up one bird after another; they were quite used to her gentle hands; she knows the soft, mousey bloom that lingers on the plumage of the young birds, and the rings on the ankles of certain others which tell their tale of age and lineage, but it was hard to be sure of the sex!

"Your mother is good at that," said Tods. "She knows a score of little differences between the birds. I've often wondered at it."

"Yes," said Lesley doubtfully. "I do hope I've got them right."

Four handsome pigeons were packed and labelled at last; and she drove them to the station, while Tods balanced the box carefully on his knees, and said ingratiating words through the wooden slats to the astonished travellers.

Meanwhile the gallant returned to his new flat with a glorious stick in his beak. He was perturbed to find no pretty maid waiting at the door to give him a hand with it, but he could not think too much about that; one step at a time. The desire that burned in his breast like a beacon at the moment was the instinct to build a nest. He had found a house, a beautiful empty nest-box, with two compartments, a perfect house, and now it had to be furnished before anything else. He struggled with the long twig; it would not go through the door very easily; he tried it several ways, getting hot and bothered; for hours he tried in his inexperience, obsessed with one thought, to get that thing into his house, his domed head and brilliant eyes twisting this way and that, his pretty coral legs dancing about. He got so tired at last that he let it drop on the threshold and stepped inside to think things over and have a rest.

Something else was bothering him now. He wanted help; where was that pretty female? He was hungry, too, the fever of nest-building abated for a moment in face of this need of food, the other pain ached dully under the clamorous hunger. Where *was* the flirt?

He peered out, and saw the end of the stick pointing his way; he had been trying to get it in crossways all day. He pulled it in with glee, and then went out for food.

We had the next part of the story by letter.

For several days, it appears, Mr. and Mrs. Bentley studied the habits of their new pigeons. The purchase of these highly-bred table birds had been an experiment. They were used to the ordinary fancy pigeons common to English gardens, but this broad-breasted, squab-raising strain so well known in America was new to them.

The birds are famous for their industry in raising young; it is an absolute passion with them to sit all the year round; and supply the tables of their owners with a constant supply of squab-delicacies.

The new birds puzzled them.

"There's something going on we don't understand, old girl," said the master at last. "I wonder what's wrong."

His wife laughed.

"Teddy, I believe we have three women to one man, and the jealousy is beyond words; there is

one man all right, because he keeps courting one of the others; then there is one who looks lovesick and sits alone; and the other is a regular she-devil. She keeps trying to get the man away from the bird he wants, who looks a decent sort, but afraid to go near him because of the Jezebel. It's an absolute drama; come and watch."

In a corner of the flight cage a young bird sat forlorn. Her feathers ruffled, her eyes dull, her head listlessly turning as the humans came to look at her.

"There's a mouldy messmate for you!" said the master. "And just look at that besom over there, will you?"

In the squab-house a shameless display of charms was being made before a bored gentleman of the uttermost integrity. Pigeons are very affectionate birds, and mate for life; it is unusual for a husband and unheard of for a wife to be unfaithful. The ardent *amoureuse* was playing a losing game, for the eligible had turned his eye upon a gentle dame, who sat as near her love as she dared, watching with soft warm eyes the gleaming feathers and flashing glances of the slighted hussy.

"We'll send for two more cock-birds," said Mr. Bentley.

But his wife had another thought.

"I believe that unhappy creature down there misses her mate; she may have just paired, you

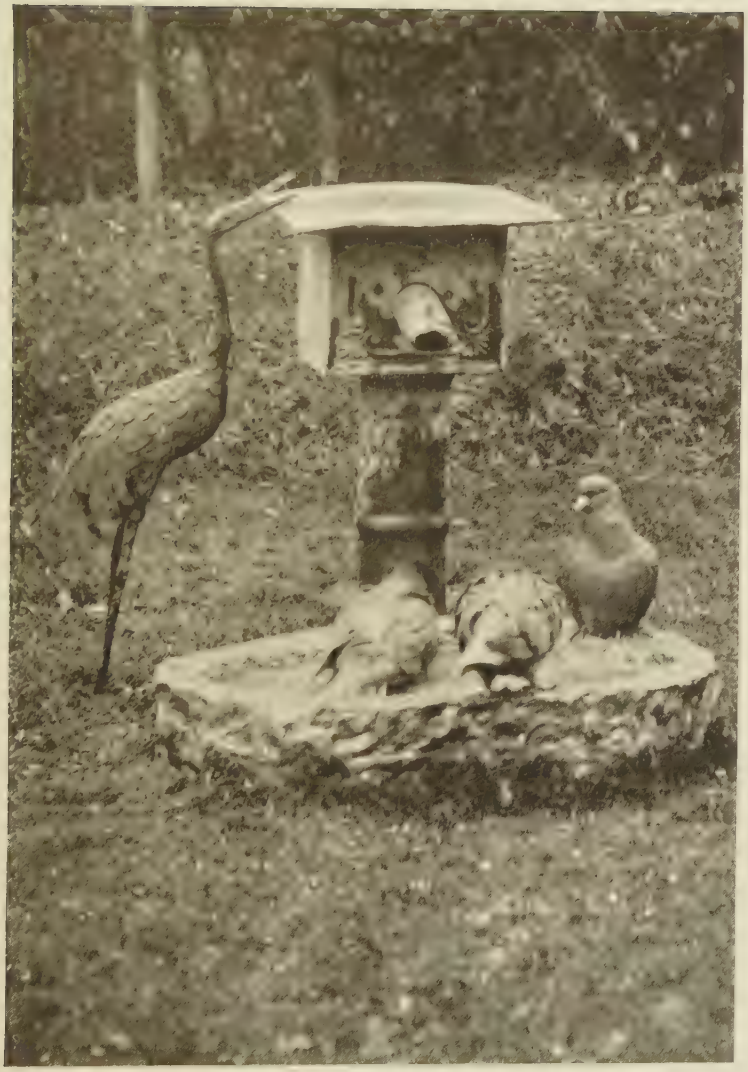
know; ten to one they won't happen to pick her own mate to send us, and all the rest of her life, she'll have to make second-best do. That so often happens to folk. Let's send *her* back, and ask for a real bully of a fellow in her place; anything will please this piece of goods here, the wretch, so long as it's a man. *She's* not in love with anyone!"

Life had indeed taken hold of that bloomy maid of the morning and given her a terrible trouncing. A glorious home and the heart's beloved snatched away in the winking of an eye, the awful noises and smells of car and train in a box with birds she did not know nor ever want to know. Especially one of them! Suppose some awful creature like this light o' love were meeting that fiery glance she adored, watching the dancing, mincing steps of those slender coral legs, hearing the rich, sweet call-notes in his voice?

Her little heart constricted and hurt in the agony of her loss. When they put her alone in a box and sent her off she was more dead than alive; she hardly noticed the smells and noises of travel.

"Oh, dear, you sent three females and a male, darling," I said a day or two later, "come and find a good male to make amends. They have sent one back."

"That's all right, Mummy. I've been watching



THE MAID OF THE MORN.

a young fellow moping by a nest. He wants a mate. We'll send him."

We went out to the garden and opened the travel box; there was a crumpled heap of red feathers in a corner; the girl took the returned bird up in her hands.

"Poor thing, it has not liked the journey."

At the sound of her voice the little female shook her feathers and looked up. She knew that voice —where was she? There was the lily-pool—the lily-pool again!

And there, disconsolate, alone, upon the threshold of his wonderful house, hunched upon his slim red legs, was her lovely love, her heart's delight. The blood throbbed in her throat. She spread her wings and flew straight into Paradise.

The sound of pure rapture sang through the wind-harps that hour.

It was an effort to leave them, and go indoors to write to the good observant woman who had saved these two for each other.

"Dear Mrs. Bentley,

"I am so sorry for the mistake. Here is a young bachelor able to keep the liveliest bird in order. As you supposed the other was not ill, she was pining for her mate. It was wonderful to see them meet; and now there is a terrible lot of billing and cooing going on, they have found sanctuary

at last. I hope you will have good luck with your four re-assorted birds."

The word " sanctuary " has a holiness in its sound, it is a shelter for the persecuted, a place of refuge for the hunted. Home is our sanctuary from the world, from the hunting, harrying, demanding world. And when people speak of " bird sanctuaries " the heart inclines itself toward the kind sound of the words, feeling in a moment the driven and persecuted life of birds, and what it must mean to them somewhere to have a sure refuge.

The word is generally used in a broad sense of large areas of land; for instance the Island of Skokholm, in St. George's Channel, off the Pembroke coast, is a bird sanctuary, and there both birds and wild flowers are preserved from the despoiling hands of the ignorant and cruel; it is a sort of natural rock garden where wild flowers grow among the rich grasses and heather; the rock outcrops, making those " pockets " dear to the nurseryman's rock-gardening heart. It has a landing stage, and a lighthouse and abundant fresh water; a considerable sanctuary where many rare and interesting bird species breed.

Another is the Torquay Watershed, Dartmoor, where buzzards, kestrels and sparrowhawks are safe from the persecutions of gamekeepers; and there

they are increasing as the tree plantations on the watershed grow up.

Another great bird reserve is in Scotland, at Duddingston Loch, where the coot and mallard, sedge warbler and reed bunting breed, in all some eighty species foregather there; and yet another sanctuary is being established on Romney Marsh, where many and rare winter migrants rest.

These are all large places under specially organised supervision; places where birds may breed undisturbed, and the senseless work of extermination by generations of bird collectors and men with guns, may in time be made good.

Though the general public cannot enjoy the fascinating pleasure of observing the love romances and the life-stories of the beautiful wild creatures safeguarded there, they can rejoice that the work is being done, and encourage the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds; and if we think for a moment the little souls are ours to conjure out of the air by mere kindness. Each one of us can, if we will, make a small refuge and resting place, a tiny sanctuary, for the birds, around the home which is our own Sanctuary.

I will admit that the bird-table and the bird-bath are to me as full of interest and adventure as any part of the garden; the pond where the fish are and the moorhens and the kingfisher come is

delightful, but not so absorbing as the "refectory" near the house-windows, where the jays and magpies, robins, thrushes, wagtails, blackbirds, tits, finches and starlings shout themselves hoarse, push, scramble and squabble, snatch and twitter, all of a bustle to bag the best bits. That table daily spread for them has made the wild birds very tame about my home.

Bird-tables and bird-baths are placed well in the open, so that cats cannot ambush the little guests; and both are pretty and appropriate garden features; harmonious in the general scheme; serving a good cause. No one nowadays is so ignorant as to question the value of birds to house and garden. The young in one swallows-nest will consume on an average 800 flies a day (mosquitoes and the disease-carrying house-fly). Sparrows are the (only) enemy of the celery fly; one plover in the nesting season will destroy 20,000 wire worms and leather jackets; an incalculable number of insects are destroyed in garden and orchard by birds whose beak is "Nature's perfect implement for finding egg, chrysalis, grub and winged imago."

From the centre of the bird-table spring slender arms of hand-beaten iron, on which can be hung various offerings; coconuts sawn in half, suspended on string, swaying like windbells; ribbons of bacon-rind and necklaces of peanuts and walnuts, or Barcelona and Brazil nuts threaded on string

after shelling; or again a meaty beef bone, which the magpies adore.

On the table, underneath these odd inflorescences of the iron stems, lie scattered seeds and bread-crumbs, for the vegetarians. It is fun to watch the tits, so exquisite in their blue and yellow colouring, so tiny and so active, emerge from the hardships of a hard and frosty winter round and fat, bursting with good cheer and all agog for the social efforts of the spring, just because they have been playing merry-go-round on the wind-blown cocoanuts and stuffing themselves with the bacon-fat and suet of our bounty all the lean months of perilous winter-time.

Nor have they or any other petitioner thirsted; however hard the frozen ponds and puddles there has been clear fresh water in the birdbowl every day.

I have a very odd and original birdbowl built up of several friendships. It began with a lead pump which I admired for its history and marks of handicraft as well as dents of Time, but it looked very forlorn and leggy till a friend arrived who made a lead basin to go on top; and then the birds came there to drink.

But it was still rather an unbalanced affair and much too small for the pigeons (who drink three times as much as fowls) dipping their beaks in and swallowing in long gulps like horses do. So another

friend sent a hollowed piece of Dorset stone from Thomas Hardy's country, which pulled the whole thing together in a wonderful way. When I set it at the foot of the pump it enchanted the pigeons, who come every morning and sometimes at tea-time, too, to bathe and drink and strut round it.

The last offering was from a lady who went to Holland with me one year to see the fields of tulips in bloom. She sent a bronze stork in memory of our happy flower pilgrimage. It carries strings of nuts in its beak in the winter days to the gratification of the tits, and makes a perfectly harmonious finish to the structure.

Pursuing the idea of a bird sanctuary in the garden another kindness is to plant by preference those shrubs and trees which bear berries for them, foregoing perhaps the newer, expensive fashionable plants for the homely beauty of hawthorn, elder, yew, berberis, gean and so on.

Nest-boxes hung on trees are sometimes tenanted, but I fancy the strange apparition suddenly extruded upon the familiar contour of a tree-trunk appals the birds with the idea of an ambush rather than tempting them with the invitation of a suitable house-to-let. They generally prefer a tangle of thorny sprays, a bough swinging in the wind, a hole in a gnarled limb, the deeps of a thorn-brake, furze-bush, or warm thick hedge. But birds that have come to look upon a certain garden as home will

THE "REFECTORY" NEAR THE HOUSE WINDOWS.

even build among the roses; one can hardly imagine a prettier honeymoon house than a chaffinch's nest neatly woven among the nimble strands of rosy Dorothy Perkins or the honey-coloured Goldfinch Rose.

Once they have learned to trust a garden they make use of all sorts of amusing unexpected places, and often fly to the familiars of the house to remind them they are waiting, if the feeding time has been delayed.

The best bird sanctuary of all is that which patient and sympathetic teaching can build in the hearts of egg-collecting boys; they learn, if they are shown the mysteries beyond the nest, how much more interesting than the possession of a box of blown shells it is to possess the book of the living bird, through observation at first hand of its ways in the wild. The movement is gaining ground, and slowly, practically, the Sermon on the Mount is being woven into the texture of the every-day life of the people.

After the reunion of the bereaved gallant with his faithful lady my morning walk had to be delayed while I loitered near to enjoy their happy house-keeping; never have I seen two birds more deeply content. The light came out of the dawn and shone on the closed cups of the water-lilies. In the marvellous flat two little red bodies sat re-garding a rather amateurish nest. It had never

been quite right, because that first stick was too long.

"Lovely, isn't it?" he cooed.

"Darling, everything is wonderful," she said.

Memory came stabbing back to him.

"Next time I tell you to wait for me, you *wait*," he raged, and pecked her shining neck in a storm of fear and love.

She held up her head to his furious caress, glad of him.

CHAPTER V

"We sometimes see a change of expression in our companion and say, his father or his mother comes to the windows of his eyes, and sometimes a remote relative. In different hours, a man represents each of several of his ancestors, as if there were seven or eight of us rolled up in each man's skin—seven or eight ancestors at least—and they constitute the variety of notes for that new piece of music which his life is."

Emerson.

CHAPTER V

ANCESTOR-WORSHIP

PEOPLE who cannot feel magic persist in believing that gardening is all weeding and manuring—all digging and backache, and so they miss the lights of fairyland. Romance is the most practical thing in the world, for it is that alone which makes life worth living; among the flowers and trees it waits for us.

A garden is a book full of stories; a minstrel sweet with singing; the life music throbs in a score of heart-compelling tales.

Though I am freely accused of a passion for viburnums I have a more deeply rooted one for roses; it is, I think, the loveliest flower of all that blows.

Its origin is lost in the mists of immemorial antiquity, but it remains the flower of love and poetry, of chivalry and battle, of history and literature, flower of all the world from Greenland to New Zealand. The romance of the rose has neither beginning nor end; Solomon, the lover, sang of it, and Esdra, the prophet, poets of every clime and

race, of all times and tongues, tell the enchantment of its frail fleeting beauty, of its fragrance and its colour.

It is the flower of the Motherland, woven by a thousand strands of tradition into the history of our race, into the devices of old families and old buildings from the Royal house downwards, and into the gardens of the people great and small. It grows by byre and hedgerow, by hall and homestead, in all its multitudinous forms, from the sweet briar to the rarest, latest gold medal hybrid.

The rose of Damascus, famous for its rich attar scent is still grown upon the grave of Omar Khayyám at Nashipur; it was probably that same red Syrian rose brought home by the Crusaders and adopted as the device of the House of Lancaster in 1277. The ancestry is traceable in the rich perfume of its descendant, the beautiful old-fashioned red and white striped rose we call the "York and Lancaster," and seldom see to-day. Where one finds a bush it is generally in an old cottage garden or else in that of some scholar whom learning has not stripped of the simplicity which is the loveliest wisdom. If we are lucky enough to find it we may sometimes see a pure red and a pure white on the same root; and, flowering beside them, their striped sister blooms, which mingle in their fragrant bodies the two warring blood streams;

spelling out the tale of the end of the War of the Roses.

The rose became England's National Emblem in 1461, but long before that the flower played its profound part in daily life; the beads upon which people counted their prayers were called rosaries because they were originally made of the pressed and polished petals of red roses; the Golden Rose was ceremonially presented by the Pope when he would give signal honour to some king or country or cathedral; and the meaning of hanging a rose from the ceiling at very important councils or national meetings was well known from early times; everything said "under the rose" was secret, and might not be repeated.

In scores of ways the name of the rose has embroidered the English tongue, its imagery is irresistible; we find it everywhere—rose-garden, rose-red, rose-bower, rose-noble, rose-stitch—it would be hard to count the uses of that one word. In heraldry and in architecture it is the wild rose, the "Tudor rose" which is hallowed, the form of enchanting simplicity modelled upon the species native to English soil which we see from babyhood each time we are taken for an airing in the country lanes where the wild rose shines on midsummer's green. The most familiar and everlastingly fresh of all the hedgerow flowers: Custom cannot stale in our eyes the sweet purity of its contour.

When we begin to sudy the genus thoughtfully we find ourselves surprised by the immense number of species, and the many ramifications of form and colour which have been won from them by the patient labours of amateurs and nurserymen. It is hard to remember them all, cabbage roses, moss roses, monthly, tea, hybrid-tea, damask, Austrian copper, Persian yellow, boursault, bourbon, noisette, polyanthas, hybrid-perpetual, wichuriana, banksian, rugosa, the old apothecaries' rose, the rose of Provence—and that is not all by any manner of means. The national flower is so various in form and habit, and so constantly springing new surprises, that we can never weary of growing it if we would !

To mention only one instance the advent of Crimson rambler which is within the memory of many people to-day; it is a mildewy, unscented, somewhat bad-tempered affair—but it was once a miracle in the rose-garden, all the same; for there appeared with it a new rose-form, a rambling, scrambling, decorative rose full of marvellous possibilities for draping banks, arches and pillars, entirely different to the stiff pointed, full-bosomed "exhibition" roses which had formerly been the ideal. Soon afterwards (in 1901 to be exact) a much sweeter-growing, better mannered rambling rose appeared, a full lusty pink, also scentless, but full of grace and attraction which took every

heart by storm; there was hardly a garden which did not rush for it; they called it Dorothy Perkins!

The list of ramblers is a long one now, we know it well, all springing from the single species which a man called Dr. Wichura found in Japan and brought to Europe.

And the same tale is true of other forms. The musk rose is the ancestor of that charming race with shrub-like habit and spreading growth which goes on blooming from Spring till winter frosts, in fragrant persistence, and which keen amateur gardeners grow abundantly for sheer joy of its vigour and scent. The race is known as "hybrid-musks," and was raised in Essex by a clergyman who loved roses and wanted to see them frost-proof so that we could have them in bloom out of doors all the year round. He nearly succeeded, too! The hybrid-musks are very hardy, and bloom later than any.

With these rambling and shrubby bunch-roses came also the pretty carpeting kinds; low compact polyantha forms, in a dazzling range of colour from clear white to hot orange and deep crimson with all the intermediate shades; and year after year for the last century a constant supply of exquisite new hybrid-teas has flowed to the Show Bench, and the garden, in countless variations of beauty.

We have them with long pointed buds, or short and full, elegant and robust; thick and thin ; loose and easy; with clear transparent blood-red thorns; with tiny fern-like foliage; or great leaves, thick and glossy; we have them flowering continuously from wood so lovely in its young bronze, purple and copper, that it is, in itself, a garden joy.

We have despoiled the old adage and now grow fragrant bushes of the "rose without a thorn." We have blooms as big as peonies; or if we like them small we can grow flowers as dainty as a fairy's laugh, the whole rose-bush—flower, foliage, stem and root-system held easily in the palm of a little hand; a jewel to bedeck the rock-garden.

We have perfumes to beguile the dullest. The voluptuous attar of rose, the delicate wistful tea rose, the piquant pine-apple and peach scent, the sweet briar which is a sublimation of the last; the sweet light wild-rose smell, the spicy or cinnamon scent; the warm rich musk; and that moving fragrance in one certain rose which wiles a summer's day with the thought of old love-letters. It has the sweet, dry, dusty smell we meet when sometimes we find courage to open a hidden packet and touch again the faded petals, pressed between the written words. . . . and find both fragrant still. . . .

This lyric love grows all over the world; we can

find it on prairie, veld, and in the backwoods; by tea, coffee, and rubber gardens; by gum avenues; by stoep and shack and homestead; by orchards, farms and mines. And here, in Britain, we may look on a million maiden roses abloom under the mountains of Mourne; we may see wide hedges and plantings on the other side of Hadrian's wall; there is never a lane or garden without its rose in the Mother-isle.

It has sounded in music and literature all down the centuries; and in the lives of people great and small. We have but to listen, and here and there from all sorts of unexpected places the sweet rose-melodies come to our ears.

I know of two poor dressmakers who made a will o' the wisp obsession for roses into a tangible life-giving reality.

They were sisters who had worked together all their dressmaking days with a rare singleness of purpose; they had had one stay to guide them, one goal to which they had toiled. Slowly, painfully, but steadily, they had saved a little money year by year, for ever since they had taken their mother away, sleeping in an unexpected youthful smooth-ness, and had left her facing the Dawn in the crowded cemetery, her unsatisfied longing had become their close companion.

"Some day I'll find you a garden again in the country and I'll pick you roses. . . ."

She had said it often and often; plucking her pale lips.

It was as if that ghost lived still. An unquiet ghost, which, lovingly, they would for her sake lay. Upon her grave they had left a bunch of roses, and when her birthday came round every year they bought some for the house, telling each other over and over again how they would own a garden, and learn, without her but because of her and for the sake of her, what the thing was like she had so loved and desired and longed to find again . . . "picking roses."

Their eyes would grow moist and gentle at the words "I'll pick you roses."

It was the best wish they could offer each other; their sacred hope; their holy secret joy. Some day they would pick each other roses . . . in a garden. And she would know, and be at ease wherever she had flown; to whatever paradise; to whichever distant star—she would know; and be at ease.

They seasoned their hard-working days with a practical mysticism.

Their mother had been country-bred; a young widow, left to bring up her two daughters in great poverty. With no accredited qualification but a great deal of spirit she betook herself to one of the unfashionable crowded London suburbs and managed to scratch out a living for the three of them by teaching singing.

Fortunately for her, if less fortunately for the pupils, wireless had not then begun its incalculable service to the public. It was not then possible to twist a knob and call down out of the void rich voices, well-placed, perfectly trained, singing the best music night after night. The taste and ear of the million remained untrained and uncritical; pure tone was a thing so seldom heard that it was never missed.

She worked hard, wore herself out long before the allotted span, and turned out her measure of throaty tenors and nasal sopranos upon an ignorant community.

The daughters, having shown a certain ability to make the best of any bits of material they could find, had started with the same blithe temper to become dressmakers; training each in turn at large London shops of the cheap cash-trade sort. They began to "build up a connection" in time, attending customers in the stuffy front room which for years had tinkled to "Love's Old Sweet Song," "Douglas Gordon," and "Absent."

They were pleasant, willing young women. Edith had a big nose and a poor complexion, Mary had a slight curvature hardly enough to make her a hunchback, but enough to spoil her figure. Both of them had their mother's eyes; faithful and affectionate.

People liked them; their little business grew quietly and steadily till there came a day when they had to sell the old piano to make more room, and that started them on the road of the Thought which was to sweeten all their days. As the vanmen removed it and they fingered the cheque in its place their tears were dried by the idea of dedicating it to realising their mother's dream.

They banked it in the Savings Bank, and month after month for twenty years they had added to that mite such sums of money as they could scrape and spare. Through all the ebb and flow of the little everyday matters of life this hope remained their goal.

They would find a place in the country, they told themselves, where a dressmaker was needed, and carry on their work; "picking roses" while they waited for customers. Their little capital would pay the cost of moving, the rent for a couple of years, and keep them while they waited for business to appear, and they could address themselves to the old task of "building up a connection."

One day they heard of a cottage and garden which seemed good to them because the advertisement said "excellent rose-soil." They went to see it and their eyes had roamed over the little garden. City-bred they had only seen roses in florists' windows, or hawkers' baskets, all the year round.

The charming race known as "Hybrid-Musk" Roses.

They knew nothing of seasons of bare thorny bushes, dormant and empty through the winter; of skimpy pruned bushes in spring, or floods of blossom in spate in summer gardens. To those two London sempstresses, roses only meant the long-stemmed flowers grown under glass and sold with wired stems. They looked at the brown earth sorrowfully.

Then they went back to the landlord and gravely told him they did not want the cottage.

"Not big enough?" he asked.

"Oh, yes, it was big enough."

"What then?"

"There were no roses as he had told them; he must have made a mistake."

For a moment he surveyed the two meagre, middle-aged women, with the faithful pathetic eyes which had earned, had they known it, all the kindness life had ever shown them. His lips were pursed as if he would whistle.

"You come from London?"

"Yes, they did."

He thought again and whistled aloud.

"Come along o' me," he said. "Let's look again."

Down through the little lane, where the hedges were already green with the tendrils of young honeysuckle, they went and entered the gate once more.

"What's them then?" (pointing to a row of standards) "and them?" (indicating leafless bushes with bronze and green buds breaking). "Them's roses—you should see 'em in another couple of months. You'd know what they was then."

Back from the visit of inspection they sat again in the old workroom; strewn with bits of silk and cotton; scissors, pins, irons, the two sewing machines; piles of boxes; the untidy curtains hiding a view of chimneys and a dirty brick wall; the close heavy smells; the familiar room of so many headaches in which their days had been spent.

Edith sat patiently stitching, but Mary was restless.

"I don't know that we might not learn; everyone has to learn. . . ."

Her voice trailed away, and a sudden April shower beat a tattoo upon the window panes behind their dingy curtains. She bent her head over the ironing board, and each was back in the twilight of doubt, looking at the face of an old desire from a new viewpoint.

"If we could learn somehow . . ." repeated Mary, putting the iron down gently; all their movements were gentle. Edith sighed. The brown earth had looked terrifyingly strange to eyes used to needle and thread; its texture unlike anything she had ever touched.

A customer came for a fitting, and soon their hands were busy about her. She was served by two gentle-handed women, dismayed by the unfamiliar aspect of their imagined rose-garden.

"I came Saturday morning to see if you could fit me then, but I couldn't get an answer," said the woman, shifting her feet carefully, not to disturb the "set."

"We were out," said Edith. "We had gone to look at the cottage we told you about."

"Did you like it?"

"Oh, yes, it was a nice little house," they said; "bigger by far than this and far less rent." But they were distressed because they were afraid the gardening was beyond them. They knew nothing about "agriculture," they told her, and it seemed to be a very puzzling affair.

"My son can grow things. He has two lovely geraniums in his window-box," declared their customer. "He knows where to go for help. There is a place in the West End where they do nothing but help people to grow flowers, the National Gardens Guild they call it. It's in Gower Street, off Bedford Square. No. 9. You go right up to the top, he says, and ask for help. And they always put you right. It's what they're for."

The Honorary Secretary of the National Gardens Guild was biting his pencil, thoughtfully, a week later, upon the plans for the great Amateur Flower

Show at Lord's. The sisters found him, and began nervously telling their tale.

He was an imaginative and sympathetic soul, accustomed to such calls, and he had realised their bewilderment after a sentence or two. But being young, the human problem ceaselessly enchanted him. He laid aside his work and skilfully drew out the picture of their lives; easily and without an apparent question he perceived that these industrious townswomen, least likely of all figures of romance, had touched the springs of poetry in their effort to give to their mother, so long dead, the thing she had vainly and deeply desired in life.

"Better than any gravestone," he reflected, looking at them with bright alert eyes and feeling the steadfast quality in the gaze they fixed upon him. "It's the ancestor-worship idea sublimated into a garden of roses! What an idea these two have stumbled upon, and how happy they are and how rich in it."

He smiled, and went into an inner office, searching the files rapidly for the address he wanted. The Guild has all this sort of information at its fingers' ends; it is a body of eager enthusiasts existing only to encourage the growth and love of flowers and of gardening among amateurs, and to teach the beginner and the town dweller how to begin his games in Nature's nursery.

"Here you are," he said, handing them an address, "here is the name of the President of the Garden Society in your village; it is affiliated to us. Join the society. They will teach you."

But neither he, nor they, nor anyone could have guessed what a change he was invoking in the very fabric of their flesh when he handed those two the address across his office table; nor how mightily it would work upon them!

As their eyes warmed into hopeful gratitude, he wondered if by any chance they would take his advice, actually uproot themselves from their London habits and hard-won business and fling themselves in middle-age into a country life; so entirely different from anything they had ever known that it would be almost as easy for them to make a home in a foreign land, and learn to speak a foreign tongue.

"It's a bit mad of me to encourage them, I suppose," he reflected, "and yet what a rotten trick it would be to quench their romance! They have a vision; it is only dreamers who ever find the Promised Land."

It was lucky for those two women that they had not come under the influence of some commoner soul at that juncture of their lives—one who might have preached "safety first," snapped the tender shoots of their enterprise, choked the springs of adventure and enlightenment; and kept them on the road of the dull and the commonplace by

advising them to stick to the job they knew; and to live and die in Camden Town. They met, instead, the glance of a poet, and from the day they turned out of Gower Street discussing his encouragement, their true life might be said to have begun; and the music of it sang among the peoples.

Many moons later the honorary secretary of the Guild was judging at a country flower show, and after the customary exchange of compliments and votes of thanks, the President of the society brought up certain of the leading horticultural lights to meet him.

"Let me present to you two of our most active members; I don't know what we should do without them!"

He found himself shaking hands with a couple of fat strangers who beamed affectionately upon him. His bright, observant gaze passed over them without recognition.

"Merry old dears!" was his mental comment.

"You don't remember us!" they cried in unison; he searched his memory unavailingly.

At tea, later, his hostess referred to them again.

"They were very excited when they knew you were coming," she said.

"I don't remember them—I see so many," he murmured remorsefully.

"Yes, yes! I know; and they will quite understand. Why, they are really a remarkable pair;

rank Londoners; they didn't know a cabbage from a crocus when they came; anæmic, skinny creatures; silent, and frightened of an owl or a bat." She smiled at some memory and went on: "But they were tremendously watchful, and then they began to ask questions—and at last they started to work at their garden.

"They noticed everything." Again she smiled to herself. "They found that skirts were tiresome garments to garden in; and they invented the famous kit everyone wears now. They dressed our local Garden Guild in it before long, and now they make it for people all over the country. They get a lot of money out of that design . . . it's a very good one, too—light and warm and durable, with pockets in the right places, gives you absolute freedom of movement. A sort of baggy trouser affair it is, proof in any wind, easy to slip on and off, and the weight cleverly distributed. There's a streak of genius in that garment. We owe them a lot for thinking it out! Have some more tea? . . . And all the while they were learning *how* to live in the country; so much more complicated than in towns where everything is standardised. They proved to have native wit, and oh! what a green finger that fat Mary has! They had been dressmakers, you see, and had learned to use their hands skilfully. I wish I could bud and graft like she does."

A light dawned faintly in the mind of her hearer; a dim memory stirred a phantom recollection of two lean and anxious women asking him questions, about a rose-garden, late at the office one evening years ago . . . two ugly women with fond eyes. They had had a gleam and followed it—a will-o'-the-wisp, it might be . . . or a star.

"I believe I begin to remember them," he said thoughtfully. "They were quite interesting, tell me more."

"Well! There it is. Instead of diffusing their energies over fruits and vegetables and all sorts of flowers they had the sense to concentrate. They became keen rosarians! You know it really is amazing to see how the tall one collects species. She has moyesii, pteracantha, rubrifolia, bracteata, moschatus, and wichura of course, but a dozen rarer forms as well. One of these days I believe they will begin hybridising, and make new rose history for us!"

There gushed back on him a freshet of memory. He recalled the picture of two frail backs cautiously descending the office stairs, and the compunction which had assailed him as he saw them go.

"I banked on that ancestor-worship idea," he said to himself. "It has been their strength and inspiration and gold-mine, after all!"

On the way back to the station he took occasion to pass by their place and look over the gate; it

was an old-fashioned cottage deeply embowered. A round puss licked its paws upon the doorstep; through the open diamond-leaded casement came the wireless programme; someone at 2LO was broadcasting "Absent."

Away in the garden a rosy, bulbous old woman held a basket, half full, and another tiptoed, groaning, to reach a bloom overhead; it swayed and bobbed, high up against the distant blue.

The sisters were picking roses.

CHAPTER VI

"The white mares of the moon rush along the sky
Beating their golden hoofs upon the glass Heavens;
The white mares of the moon are all standing on their hind legs
Pawing at the green porcelain doors of the remote Heavens."

Amy Lowell.

CHAPTER VI

BUTTERY WOOD

THEY were all fussing about round the garage; I kept padding after them like a puppy after a bone; I did not want to be left behind—but there was a chapter to be finished, and they all knew as well as I that if I was to be fit to live with to-morrow I must get that last five hundred words off my mind before the morn.

And now they had all gone, the old house and I were quite alone. They had taken the car and gone slipping down through Romney Marsh to the sandy beeches of Dymchurch to swim in a full tide at moonrise. I was left behind, very fractious and cross because of that unfinished work.

A warm breath of the matthiola bicornis we call more prettily night-scented stock came into the study, and I leaned out of the window to enjoy some more for an idle second. The moon would soon push a great golden ball up over the hill, it was too lovely a night to start work all at once; I would walk among the flowers of the dusk awhile,

I thought, and then come back to the desk; I dislike writing at night.

At the end of the "difficult day" comes the happy time of rest, the mellow evening, when work should be over and we can turn to the garden for meditation, for the voluptuous silences of nature, for the "incomparable pomp of eve," or we can relax to laughter, refreshment, music, dancing and the joy of friends.

Of all the times of the day when a busy human may enjoy the garden none is so precious as that hour when breathless noon and hot afternoon have passed . . . when the light begins to slip away softly under our very eyes so that we can see it go inch by inch . . . a rope being paid out . . . and then a slackened ease looses the bonds of the tired mind.

With the turn of the sun into the west most flowers fold up, waterlilies, convolvuluses, peonies, Barberton and michaelmas daisies, to name but a few, and those that do not sheath up their loveliness generally withdraw their scents and go to sleep.

But some flowers surprisingly awake at night and unfold their merchandise of sweets beneath the moon. There is nothing in that ragged little nobody of the day-time, the night-scented stock, to warn us of the precious wares it carries. The small slip of a thing cowers all through the bright

days in a dowdy beige negligé, and then at sun down comes out into the garden in a starry lilac shift thrilling the nights with a passion of rich scent.

The oenotheras, our stately "evening primroses," are dear to the heart of the gardener not only for the wide disks of purest yellow ranged up the spikes, but also for the memory of W. H. Hudson who loved them beyond any other flower. He was accustomed in his youth to watch the slim pale yellow buds unfold at eveningtime in La Plata, and to smell the sweet scent with a boy's luscious gulping sniffs;—in later sadder years, when he was an obscure author struggling in England, the scent of evening primroses in a garden would always take him back to the grassy pampas, to the nights when he had been sleeping under the stars, and to the delicious moment of awakening in the dawn of another day to the scent of those "pale yellow earth-stars, scattered in millions over the surface of the tall sere grass."

He wrote of them with a poignant simplicity that has made those flowers his image and his memorial in many an English garden to-day;—but even where there is not this bond there is a joy in planting evening primroses for themselves; they are lusty, happy things, growing anything from three to five feet high—blooming sweetly in the summer dusk, and sowing themselves cheerfully

hither and yon in chancy nooks all over the gardens that they like best.

Stung by conscience, but still truant from the desk, I walked over to the dell where the pale oenotheras bloom, and climbed up to the dream-seat to see the moon roll up out of the east. It was there that Herbert Oliver watched it before he wrote the "Dream-seat" music, and he made that moon uprise for us in a rich and moving melody which wrings our hearts every time we hear it.

The night swept on, a warm, delicious summer night which made me long to smell again the moonflowers at Vergelegen; those who have slept in its spacious guest-room with doors and windows wide to the stars—will know the scent of the moonflowers there at African dusk and dawn.

And some who know that other moon where it rises over Diamondhead, that maddening radiant Polynesian moon, may have seen the most wonderful flower-miracle in all the nights in all the world. Over a low stone wall surrounding a garden hang the angular flexed branches of the night blooming cereus; a solid bank of it for a quarter of a mile or more.

The people of Honolulu tell each other when the cereus is near to blooming, and they assemble in hundreds to watch the mystery unfold; it is

always on a night of bright moonlight. Almost simultaneously, about eight o'clock, twenty thousand great ivory chalices break open, unfold, and gush out perfume into the velvety Hawaiian night. Soon after midnight the cereus closes, and not for many a moon can human eye see the like again; the swooning ecstasy is over; the wall is meetly covered once more with its usual spiny green branches.

The colour of the gardens under the Southern Cross is unimagined by the peoples of the north; words convey little of their beauty, the ear tires of bright adjectives. It is of no avail to describe to eyes which have never seen them the amber and orange of cannas against a rich wine-red hibiscus, the heavy scented waxen gardenias, flame red poinsettias, the ebb and flow of the moonflowers at morn and eve, the poured out streams of bigonia Venusta "the goldenshower" the passionate draperies of bougainvillea in orange, red and purple, the blue mantles of petrea volubilis and the festooned mauve of the Jacaranda trees lovelier than any wistaria yet.

I came back from dreams of Honolulu with a start, to realise anew the penetrating and pervasive beauty of our Northern gardens. They do not madden, they enchain us. The moon flooded the Weald with golden light, the sweet persistent evening primroses sent up their incense.

A sudden memory of forgotten work pinched my heart all comfortably expanded as it was in a perfumed dream. I remembered shudderingly that I must go in and write. Sounds of revelry came up the lane, noises of feet and song and laughing. The inns were closed, and the hop-pickers were coming back to their camp fires on the hill just above.

They lingered as usual by my gate to hear if Lesley was singing. "Nobody in to-night seemingly," said one. "No singing to-night," said another regretfully. They passed on.

"I misses Bert this time I do declare," said a man's rough voice, and a woman's answered.

"That Bert Tibbits? He's a worker but it's his mother wot works the best. She can pick, she can. Why ain't she 'ere?"

"Ask another—I don't know," grumbled the man, and their voices drifted on.

But I knew. There was a music in her not being there.

Sometimes I go and lecture at the Bermondsey Book Shop in South East London among the crowded streets, and I knew Mrs. Tibbits; one year hopping in Kent she had peered over my hedge above the pond to beg a spray of purple black elderberries and we had had a long talk about it; "buttery wood" she called it; the old English name.

Her mother had been a Shropshire woman, born and bred in a thatched tumble-down cottage, in a lane set with thorn and elder trees. The corymbose cymes, like flat platters of creamy curd, which would spread across the land when the elder was in bloom were the old dame's earliest memories, and she had constantly told this London-born daughter of the virtues of the flower and all that could be made of it; something of the countryside had come down to Mrs. Tibbits from the chattering of her old mother. But Bert, her son, was citybred. He wanted to "get on"; the fields of Kent meant no more to him than hard work for which he got good pay but not good enough to risk throwing up a good job.

She had not come this time because of Bert. My mind went back to Bermondsey—and I could see her there, unhappy.

The housebreakers were demolishing a slum. Mrs. Tibbits sat a squat and gloomy figure on a heap of brick and rubble. Round her roared the tides of the great city; the noise and the smoke of its toiling ascended day and night; harsh threads wove across the skies where the air-mails swung like shuttles to and fro from city to city from land to land. Mrs. Tibbits was not concerned with these matters; she was unhappy but not because of the dust and the noise and the stench of exhaust

gases. She had missed her yearly hop-picking—that was her trouble.

Round-shouldered, lost in thought, she sat there, sniffing now and again, or scratching her dusty, grizzled head. Presently she remembered she was in good time, and leaned down, putting the shabby basket out of the hot sun while it waited for her son; there were a few minutes to spare, and the feel of the warmth on her back renewed again vividly the sense of her loss.

O! Lummy! It would be fine in the hop-gardens now, last year had been wet and cold but this was good weather and no mistake.

The memories came crowding thick; pale green glades under the trellised vines, wide canvas bins to hold the pickings, great stacks of oak cordwood to make the campfires with at night—songs after the day's work when they tramped the moonlit lanes to find the "Bull" and the "William IV"; squabbles and laughter, neighbourly crowding in little tin huts and comparisons of tally, the matey-ness of it all, the good sweet air of Kent, the wide rolling fields, windmills, the strange creatures, a moorhen on the brown water of the pool, the rabbits at evening time, those queer cats the lady in the old house kept, where there was a girl always singing.

Funny cats they were, with dark faces and bright blue eyes; but friendly if you weren't frightened

of them ; there were magpies in the hoplands, too, and once with shrill cries a harmless slowworm had thrilled her field with stories of a "snyke." Full of adventure was hopping time ; you never knew what you would see next, and you came back to London strong with new health, with good money earned ; you carried the queer bitter sweet smell of hops in your mind, and looked forward to next year, and to meeting the same pickers in the same "gardens";—sharing the same huts.

O! Well. . . .

There would be Bert coming for his grub in a few minutes. She would see his broad shoulders and stocky legs, his good-natured face and round curly brown head walking quickly towards her and his dinner. He had refused to give up his job this year to go hop-picking, he wanted to get married, that was the truth of it; and he meant to keep near his girl and make a home. Steady work was better sense, he said, than these shiftings and changings. But his mother had a drop of adventurous blood left in her, she loved the yearly flit, the gamble with the weather, the odd sensations of the country where every floor and wall was living green and living earth, when life itself pressed in upon their human bodies.

She was having a struggle with herself over his refusal to go this year; every nerve strained towards the desired holiday, and she might quite well leave

him alone, of course, to look after himself. But he had always had her to "do" for him, her mind bored into the future; there would be time enough soon . . . when he married that girl . . . he would not want his mother any more then, nor look to her for a bit of house-comfort and for his dinner. She would have to give up her hopping this year, there was no help for it.

Here was Bert! She stooped for the basket; she had put it behind a piece of old wall, left standing in the rubble and dust. There were odd pieces and bits of structure left sticking up still, here and there, in the untidy business of the demolition of a row of old houses; as she reached for the basket Mrs. Tibbits noticed a small green bough against the wall behind it, she bent closer to look. A tiny abortive bough with a few leaves, pinnate leaves with elliptical leaflets was growing there . . . the last gesture of a tree drowning under houses and streets.

Heaven alone could tell through what devious channels the will to live had sent that green thing searching for light and air from its far off deep-buried ancient root. To a philosopher the thin green spray would have spoken volumes; classing Man's uttermost effort in its proper place beside the strength of Nature. Tons of brick and cement, the pressure of myriads of feet overhead, generations of Man's extremest unkindness had not sufficed

to keep it underground. It had been stronger in its puny body than all the oppression of matter; it had come up to the light.

The indomitable spirit in a green leaf was stronger than all the bricks and mortar of Bermondsey.

Mrs. Tibbits peered at it.

"Lummy!" she muttered, "Lummy! If that ain't a bit of buttery wood!"

. . . . .

In the slothful days of Edward II when fashion and favourites filled the Court and war was looked upon as a bygone barbarism some men were building a house in that same spot. Men of the Kentish Weald, from a district they called the dens, had come up to these marshes to prove their skill, men of the Weald who knew how to fell tough oak and shape it for housebuilding with an adze. There they were in their long hosen and short breeches, the toes of their ankle-shoes betraying a coquettish inclination to follow the fashionable line of the town—for craftsmen their shoes were fully long and pointed. They sweated freely, working in the hot August sun; grumbling, laughing, gossiping; just as Bert and his mates had done all this morning about their dusty work of slum housebreaking six hundred years later.

These men worked in a green and pleasant land; not far off from them stood the ancient Cluniac Monastery; Bermondsey Cross was then the favourite bourne of many a pilgrim seeking the good of his soul. At night the mist came up from the marshy land round the river and touched the wide empty spaces with glamour. They were nearing the end of their work, the great oak structure was well and truly bolted together; a handsome kingpost sprang up from the tremendous tie-beam carrying the rafters of the roof on its spread arms; the shutters, the mullions, the arches, doors, dais, buttery-hatch, all made in fine English oak, hand-adzed and covered with a mighty roof-span.

The building of a house in those days had in it the elements of a sacrament; workmen carried devotion to their task, the sweet rituals of a home were dearly cherished in an age when life was short and security uncertain. With his good hand-craft and his Thought each man blessed the house he had helped to build, hoping that it might shelter many generations of children and bear witness to his skill and honest work.

At last one of the men put down his adze and went away into the neighbouring scrub-bush looking for something. He was a stocky fellow, broad-shouldered with a round curly head and a pleasant, good-natured face. The adze he put down had the unmistakable look of a tool which is handled by a

master; the edge of the blade curving inwards and placed at right angles to the handle, was keen and sharp; the handle itself worn to a fine polish with use. It was the tool most fitted for shaping and planing uneven timber. The man's mates looked after him laughing.

"Heard you ever the like? John Tabattes forgets nought, look now, he is seeking a graft of the eller."

The man came back in a little while bringing a young shoot, the leaves on it were glabrous pinnate leaves."

"By the buttery door, neighbours," he said, "to charm this house and drive away ill spirits."

The little plant of elder grew and flourished; it will grow readily from small shoots in almost any soil. It spread its arms far and wide, embracing the house in its shade and bringing its blessing of flowers and fruit. It was the Elder Tree—the tree of Hulda, the Goddess Hulda—protector of the household, of maidens, of marriage. None would uproot it, none would chop or burn the wood. If any should burn a bough of elder upon his hearth the spirit of the storm would come down and blow his roof away. If a witch would travel the tempest safely she cut her a broom of elder twigs. It had a potency for all magic, protecting any who sought its help, terrible only to those who feared or abused it.

The blossom was in great demand, it was sweet in salads and comfits, it made pretty perfumed washes for keeping sunburn and freckles away; generations of maidens under that old roof kept their faces cool and clear by bathing them in elder-flower water; and generations of matrons prepared the pale green ointment of elder leaves to cure burns and scalds in the household; made butts of the delicate and refreshing elder-flower wine; and later (when the trusses of black round berries ripened) made elderberry wine, that heady stimulant which the initiate know to this day is the best cure in the world for a cold if it is taken hot and spiced, with a piece of toasted bread at bed-time.

The elder tree protected the household, bees loved its scent and flies abhorred it; the beautiful old dwelling stood up to the sun and rain, and shook when the great storms blew, as mine does still, away in the Kentish Weald; for centuries it remained secure in the workmanship of honest men, blessed by its protecting and benignant tree.

As the generations rolled on the city of London spread far and farther; mean small streets swept away the beautiful ancient homes—space and dignity were lost in a crowded squalor. The arts of home were superseded by patent medicines, patent greases took the place of the green healing elder ointment,

beauty parlours made chemical face lotions and synthetic scents. Nurserymen spoke vaguely of elder as a dull or a vulgar shrub, superseding it by the expensive imported fashionable plants, by rare species and hybrids difficult to obtain and difficult to grow.

A torrent of snobbery and service flats swept the buttery trees away.

Yet still, for those who care to look for them, by many an old house there can yet be seen an aged elder flourishing and flowering by the kitchen and dairy door.

. . . . .

"Buttery wood, I do declare!" said Mrs. Tibbits.

It gave her a turn; it was too bad, reminding her of the green hop-gardens like that all over again, dang it! Of her mother and the tales of her youth; of the feel of the sun on her back in pleasant fields, of her long talk about elderberry wine with the lady who kept those cats, of the smell of the wood-fires at night round the hoppers' camp—of the rough good taste of wood-smoke in the food; of all the things she wanted to forget this year.

"Hello, Mum!" said Bert. "Bin waiting, 'ave yer?"

He took the basket and eyed his mother quizzically. "Good old gal you are . . . want ter go 'oppin'—don't yer?"

"Sims I must go without my 'ops this summer, lad. But look wot I've found—look at this 'ere, Bert!"

Flushing she bent down to show him where grew the puny green bough.

"Like a bit of a miracle growin' same as that out of nothin' but stones," she muttered.

Bert looked at the bit of wall with lordly unconcern.

"'Ave that all cleared orf in two shakes, termorrer, we will."

He kicked at the small shoot contemptuously. It broke away from the bit of rotten stump out of which it had grown under such adversity. At his kick the shoot of elder lay at the feet of the young house-destroyer.

Mrs. Tibbits picked it up.

"Pore thing. Sims as if it wanted to grow, too. I'll put it in our backyard an' give it a chance. Maybe it'ull grow us some buttery-flowers, then I can get a few sticks of rubbarb an' make you a jam your Gran knew of—tastes like greengage, it do."

She turned it over, regarding it thoughtfully.

"Good ole Mum! I'll dig you a little place fer it afore Polly and me goes out ternight—I'd like some o' that jam."

Mrs. Tibbits turned to go; there was a motherly expression on the round old face; she told herself she would be able to grow the shoot well enough if Bert would dig a bit of a place for it.

Unaware of her Blessing she ambled away, carrying the Goddess Hulda; and it throve miraculously in her dingy yard, as if it had for her a peculiar benignancy.

CHAPTER VII

"It is a neat and cleanly creature, oftentimes licking hir own body to keepe it smooth and faire, having naturally a flexible back for this purpose, and washing hir face with hir fore feet, but some observe that if she put her feete beyond the crowne of her head, that it is a presage of raine, and if the backe of a cat be thinne, the beast is of no courage or value.

It is needeless to spend any time about her loving nature to man, how she flattereth by rubbing her skinne against ones Legges, how she whurleth with her voyce, having as many tunes as turnes, for she hath one voyce to beg and to complain, another to testtifie her delight and pleasure, another among hir own kind by flattering, by hissing, by purring, by spitting, insomuch as some have thought that they have a peculiar intelligible language among themselves."

Edward Topsell

(Historie of Foure-Footed Beastes).

CHAPTER VII

WOMANLINESS

A THIN bright strain of music sang in the world because of Mrs. Tibbits who loved buttery wood but loved her son more. The unlettered woman showed a just sense of values; she knew it was better to lose the hopping that year than to lose the memory of the last time when her boy would need her mothering.

People may be as modern as they please, they may be bachelor girls and "wells of loneliness," and good luck to them; but it is mothers who know where the eternal founts of happiness do spring.

One can watch that knowledge in the little creatures, and hear the music of it sweet and clear in the lives they lead around our feet as well as in human beings. It is when one misses it in an animal that one learns, I believe, real horror.

Cats are usually adorable mothers, and it was when I found the Trollop was not, that it became difficult to endure the creature about the house. She made a discord in the days. She with her ducal

breeding, her beauty, her luxurious comfortable home, safeguarded from her earliest youth from cold or hunger, well-housed, well-fed, much admired, was not able to win our hearts because she had no heart of her own to give. A vain, self-indulgent blue-eyed graceful Trollop; all appetites.

Very different to that daughter of the people, Anne-Marie, a sleek black and white puss of the most ordinary appearance: I grew to love her very well, realising that here beside my hearth was a living portrait of essential woman; for the womanly woman to my mind is a perfect cat.

Regard now Anne-Marie, her life and death will expound quite fully that which I say.

Young and attractive, full of grace and bedevilment, she sat on the sun-hot step of a humble cottage one summer's day; her pretty head was confused with the noises of packing and her light heart invaded with the premonitions of disaster to her precious little comforts, for she was watching the break-up of the only home she had ever known. A poor home it was, too.

Anne-Marie watched the world go by, and found herself urged by a wholesome instinct to display her agility and youth to any who would notice the same, and maybe give her a chance to settle herself to better advantage. She was exceedingly pleasant and on-coming to passing strangers; purring and prancing before them. The pretty child of a healthy, hard-

working mother. Many fondled her and passed on, but not everyone; her innocent sweethearting earned its desserts. On the day that she was left roofless and motherless by the cottage folk who are not always thoughtful for the "little creatures," my maid saw the forlorn kitten, and hopefully brought the young miss into my house. After certain customary offerings in a saucer the small beast put its tail up and stuck its pins in the carpet.

"They took the mother because she was such a good mouser, and seeing there's mice here, etc., etc.," said the kind girl, anxious to get the kit a home.

I surveyed the minx, essaying to wash its tiny whiskers for the first time for itself after a drink of cream. It's mother had brought it up well: a good cat can do a lot to start her children well in life. The hand that rocks the cradle. . . .

The little one caught my eye and scrambled up on to my knee, rumbling enormous grateful purrs out of a small, frail body; and quite suddenly went to sleep.

Now observe Anne-Marie as a young woman; a gleeful piece; spruce, well-tailored, fastidiously clean. An independent creature with much proper pride in earning her own living. A righteous mouser, with a temper of her own, and sharp claws, too.

But who cares for the velvet glove without the hidden iron?

A bit of a gossip, grateful for a fine day, fond of endearments and disposed to companion me about the garden, rolling the bulbs all over the place to the detriment of colour schemes, and tangling the bast. Mischievous and merry.

Anne-Marie pursued by lovers. A mad flirt, alive in every nerve, full of zest in this new game: setting the young ginger fellow up in the barn across the fields to fight with a clever old Tom from over the hill, tossing her head and scorning the lot; Anne-Marie at nights playing the love-game with all her might according to the rules, amid plaint of lamentable troubadouring; female, besought, triumphant; aware of power and keen to enjoy it. . . . The young ginger gallant, look you, grown lean and harassed; his ears torn and bloody, his hopes at low ebb. One day a stray female went padding towards the barn and Anne-Marie, preening herself at the window, became aware of a rival.

She shot out of the house, and after a battle-royal in which the stray was utterly routed, our proud maid raced up to the barn with heaven knows what jealous tale to tell.

Espoused, Anne-Marie once more adorned the hearth; modestly washing her whiskers by the fire-side and purring gratefully before and after meat,

until once more the Life-force caught her in its stride and she lost all her pretty little vanities and affectations in the absorbing cares of a nursery.

Like her mother before her, Anne-Marie was a very devoted and upright parent; nothing lovelier could be seen than her first rapturous pride in the blind ginger kittens. She fed and washed them, carried them about, stole for them, played with them, taught them to be clean and to catch mice, lost some of her good looks, grew worried, overworked and haggard, but toiled still until they grew big and boisterous, when she turned her back firmly on the lot and left them to make their own way in life, self-respecting units of the community of cats.

And so the peaceful years went by. Anne-Marie made my house her world, of which the humans were god. She loved her god, recognising a benign if incomprehensible force above her days, under whose loving care her joys and sorrows sped.

When in the fullness of time, grown into a perky old dame, Anne-Marie was gathered to her fathers, she made as little to-do as possible in her passing. A rarer consideration this, than perhaps it might be.

Once more she clambered upon my knee as she did long ago that first time when her tiny whiskers were wet with cream.

And having arranged herself comfortably she rumbled a few soft purrs from a frail old body and, quite suddenly, fell asleep.

She who had loved life like a woman left it like a lady.

Consider then Anne-Marie.

She was neat, agile, graceful, clean, practical; a beguiling piece; she was faithful to the roof that sheltered and the hand that fed her; a hard-working mouser; given to honest jealousy: fond without shame of her food, her mate, her home, her babes; and fierce for them. She was a beautiful vamp, and an adorable mother, having no illusions as to the respective values of sex-love and mother-love. To the first she brought all her absurd, delightful coquetries and to the latter all the strength and sweetness of her body and brain. She flung herself bravely into life, getting the best out of it, and giving as good as she got.

A healthy, brainy, delightful animal, full of faults and of courage.

The Trollop was utterly different. Shameless, polyandrous and a child murderer. She would make the welkin ring with her cries when lovers were her need; anyone who knows the hideous noise that Siamese cats can make will realise full well what our days and nights were like, and then, when the time came for her to spend her strength and beauty on the care of her two kittens she aban-

doned them. We only left her two of her extravagantly large family because they were mongrels; little black males for which we could easily find good homes when they were well grown and neutered. But she deserted them. She fed them perfunctorily till they could see and then left them to die of cold and starvation.

The next time she had kittens she went into the field and cast them all away somewhere; we never knew what she did with them, and that was nearly the end of her, for we all felt nauseated and hated the sight of her when she came back slim and hungry and full of airs and graces.

"What good is she? She cares for no one but herself; why should we wait on her?" said the Singing Child.

But none of us, somehow, could put her in a basket and take her to the lethal chamber; and then Lovat won her another chance.

Lovat is the son of that well known Dr. Gordon Stables whose writings are still remembered with infinite pleasure by men who read him in their schoolboy days. About 1876 he wrote a book called *The Domestic Cat*, and that knowledge of his and affection for cats is a living element in his sons home to this day.

I like going to Lovat's house; it is full of the things that make a home; books, music, colour, a

warm welcome, a cat, a most astonishing son . . . I never can get used to young Brian. At one minute he seemed to be a placid cherub sucking his thumb in long robes and the next a tall youth with a moustache, incredibly learned. I suppose I shall walk in, all unsuspecting, one day and find him with a wife and four or five children. I can't keep pace with the boy.

His mother is a very witty woman of great charm, and she also loves cats. It is a nice catty home. Any kindly people can like a dog, indeed it would be difficult not to like the clumsy, well-meaning, good-natured things. But it takes a finer taste and subtler temperament to love a cat.

Lovat and Salome have an Abyssinian, one of those beautiful, short-coated creatures whose fur has a ground-work of reddish brown ticked with darker brown markings. Like most people of discrimination they have long come to the conclusion that short haired cats are far nicer pets than the fluffy Persians which are "out of coat" half the year, poor things, looking then so ragged and dishevelled that one wonders they have ever been called beautiful.

The svelte, lithe shorthairs, so sinuous and graceful have a compelling "chic"; they are neatly tailored, spick and span, with great wondrous eyes, and have turned the tide of favour by their poetry of

motion from those old-fashioned, long-haired Victorian cats.

Abyssinians are on the small side, with sharp-pointed ears and long intelligent faces, the tail rather fine and long; I think the day is not too far distant when they will be even more treasured than the Siamese because they are every bit as devoted and intelligent, but they do not strain the nerves of their owners with the terrible loud Siamese voice.

Salome was surprised when I said as much, looking at their beautiful puss outstretched before the fire.

"I thought you loved Siamese cats before all others," she said.

"I loved Tatty Bogle more than any cat in the world," I said, "and now I have the beautiful Sibo; but that does not make me deaf. I believe any short-coated breed as devoted and as full of character as these Abyssinians will become tremendously popular because it does not make such an awful noise as the Siamese most certainly do."

"You sound disillusioned," laughed Salome.

So I told them the tale of the Trollop, sitting there on the floor in front of their warm fire with the purring Beautiful between us.

Lovat was very interested.

"Mate that cat to a Siamese next time," he said. "I daresay she knows instinctively her kits ought

to be white, and when she sees these blacks and tabbies and things she feels there is something wrong. It's not a fantastic idea; I have seen it work before."

And so he secured a chance for the Trollop to re-habilitate herself. Though I did not put much faith in his idea.

Presently they fetched some catnip down for me to see its effect on their cat. I had often heard of this herb, and wondered what it was. They took a pinch of dry powdery leaves from a paper bag and put it in a saucer, whereupon the puss woke to immediate attention. He evidently liked the smell of it enormously, and held the saucer between his paws while he sniffed ecstatically and then played games with the saucer pushing it along the ground, cuddling it and generally behaving as though he had found some delightful toy.

He was most absurd and impish with his ridiculous pinch of dried leaves.

"You can get catnip made up into "mice" for the cats to play with," said Lovat, scribbling down an address; and I decided it was time Sibo had a toy. He has a keen sense of smell.

I have often watched him go into the garden, just as the Tatty Bogle used to, and go round smelling the flowers. When they are over his head he stands on his hind legs and pulls down the branch or blossom with his pretty chocolate paws, daintily

sniffing and passing on. He would surely love a catnip mouse.

Sibo was a gift to me from two young and beautiful women who were stewarding for me when I judged Siamese at the great Croydon Cat Show. A good steward is an important help to a judge, because the sensitive animals know the feeling of strange hands in a second, they are so highly strung that they apprehend the quality of hands even in the moment of advance, and cats show themselves to far better advantage when handled quietly and gently. A clawing, struggling bundle of fur is at a discount with the most conscientious judge.

I enjoyed my stewards that day almost as much as the beautiful cats, one was Lady Foster Fraser, whose sleek fine head and wise amber eyes are always a joy to us as are the swift movements of her slender graceful frame, and the other steward was my lassie, the "Only Woman in the World," so I passed to and fro among the exhibits full of content. Presently they lifted a young male out for me to see, and I drew a breath.

"What a glorious creature," I said. "He'll be hard to beat."

Lesley and Constance glanced at each other and laughed.

"We thought that ourselves," they said, pleased to have been right.

And the fellow took every honour of the day, including the Tatty Bogle Cup. There was none to beat him, marvellous in type, in texture, in colour of coat, in sable points, and in the deep violet of his eyes.

When he came up before all the other judges for "Best in Show," and had won that final honour, too, I went down again to his pen to have another look at him. My judging being now over, I had got a catalogue and was able to see who had won under me.

Sibo proved to be a son of champion Simple and champion Bonzo, and he had worthily upheld his noble breeding. I took him out of his pen and held him in my arms a moment for pure joy in his beauty; he cuddled there, a tired, amiable beast.

"He reminds me of Tatty Bogle," I said, half-aloud. And my lassie heard me. She knew what that meant, as do those who have read the story of Tatty in another place. It was not a thing to say indeed—it was whispered, dragged out of me half unconsciously by a look in the violet eyes—a line in the exquisite body.

"That's funny," she said, "I thought so, too."

I put him away with a sigh. Tatty, the unforgotten, stands for ever alone; it is he who makes Thomas Hardy's cry of bitter grief my own expression of distress when I read, rarely, that poem of

Tatty-Bogle—unforgotten.

his *Last words to a dumb friend.* Thomas Hardy loved his timid pensioner, and "the little talons mark, On the claw-worn pine-tree bark"—he loved his cat so much that he says, tormented:

> "Better bid his memory fade,
> Better blot each mark he made,
> Selfishly escape distress
> By contrived forgetfulness,
> Than preserve his prints to make
> Every morn and eve an ache. . . ."

Thomas Hardy loved his cat.

Toward the end of the big Croydon Show Day, when I was tired and wanted to get back home, I kept losing my stewards. I found them once earnestly chatting in a corner, blue eyes and amber eyes so intent on each other that they jumped apart almost guiltily when I bore down on them and said:

"Can't we go home now?"

They thought we might and then they vanished.

They were buying Sibo for me for a surprise! An extravagant, darling gift.

The owner was very kind, and said she would not send him to us until he had been home with her for three weeks so as to make sure he had not caught any infection at the Show. Good breeders are full of these nice ways with their animals.

When Sibo arrived at last, he came complete with his pedigree, a sheaf of his winning prize cards, *and* a small complaining young female, his stable companion, sent to prevent Sibo from feeling lonely *en route*, or strange at first in his new home. Nothing bore such witness to his princely rank in the world of cats as that retinue!

After warm welcome and renewed admiration of the lovely animal, Lesley and I turned to look at his "win" cards and study his pedigree. To our intense surprise we found that his great great grandfather was champion Carlisle Lad who was Tatty Bogle's own father! So that Tatty's image flashed to us, and Tatty's blood stream called to us that day at Croydon Show when all unsuspecting we handled the exhibits. We hugged each other with tears of happiness to know that we had recognised him across the years, and that his little ghost had come back to us, . . . our wonderful Tatty! The cat who came with Sibo developed into the Trollop —a bad mother. But most of them are good ones.

Ruskin saw a cat rush through fire and smoke to save her kittens, and he said, "I hope I'll meet that cat in heaven," I suppose he was not sure he would get there.

Once I found a cat terribly shot outside the gate of a brutal pig-farmer who had not even troubled to finish the job properly; it was crawling painfully

along a path, and every time the man spoke it snarled. I picked it up very, very carefully. It knew I was its friend and lay still in my hands.

"Where does it want to go?" I said.

"To its kitten, I suppose," said the man indifferently, pointing to a barn. I took the poor thing to the barn where a blind kitten squeaked lustily on some hay. When I laid the mother down gently beside it, the enchanted tiny ran to its comfort, and the faithful soul tried to lick the dear body of its babe before it fell back dead.

Why are people cruel to cats?

A suffering cat is to me the most heart-breaking sight; they can *feel* so intensely, and their power of gratitude and love is boundless. People who say cats are selfish or self-centred are not observant; that is all.

The good mother cat has a concentrated passion for her kittens which it is most touching to watch. The whole world is wrapped up for her in those lively, greedy little bits of fur.

Once at a Show, where once again I was judging, I had a severe shock. There was a lovely young queen, glorious eyes, typical head, pale body colour, good points and fine shape. I picked her for champion, and when my steward (he who spun silver cobwebs on the Christmas tree!) took her from the pen I saw a look of horror and pity go over his face. As I handled the queen I felt the same way myself.

Her little breasts were hot and tense, and full of milk. She had been taken from her babies to come to the Show! I put her back, feeling sick at heart; not only was she suffering physically, but I knew very well she must be upset emotionally, for these creatures love passionately, and suffer intensely, with fatalistic patience. She made no fuss or outcry. She let us handle her, and then sank back into the pen and folded her paws in resignation. Had she been even lovelier than she was I would not have given that little cat the championship, in case some other person might do likewise, and take another puss from her babes some day, thinking the prizes worth her pain.

It was a further shock to me to learn after my judging was over that the exhibitor who sent that cat was a woman. It seemed hard to believe. There are many pains awaiting us who bear; one of them is that hot, tense burning of a breast over-full of milk, it seems incredible that one mother would make another suffer that pain whatever kind of a mother—human or not.

I am reminded of the ewe I saw once in Australia; I had been driving over miles and miles of back-blocks with a sheep farmer seeing the country and observing the life of the settlers. It was late and we were tired and hungry. Presently he drew rein and looked at a white speck a long way off.

"Something wrong! It's Watson's place, but I suppose we'd better have a look."

So we turned the horse and went off toward the speck which turned out after a long bumpy drive to be a ewe lying on her side with a wraith of a lamb, staggering feebly away from us and crying in a faint heart-broken voice.

"Starved!" said the farmer as we drew near.

The ewe turned her frightened eyes upon us with a look of desperate pleading.

"Whatever is wrong?"

The farmer was down on his knees examining her gently; he pointed to her udder which was terribly distended.

"D'you see what's happened?" he asked. But I could not guess.

"The tips of the nipples have been cut off at shearing time and they have healed over so that the lamb can't suck."

I was dreadfully upset.

"Oh, dear! What can you do?"

I looked at the starving lamb, crying beside the sealed-up fountains for which he yearned—to the agonised mother longing to give him the rich milk that was near to bursting her tender silken udder, taut and stretched. It was a dreadful picture, under the bright Australian sun.

But the experienced farmer was undismayed, and laughed cheerfully.

"There!" he said, drawing his knife deftly across the top of each nipple. Blood and milk shot out, at first in a mingled fount; he rubbed the hot swollen udder gently. I have never in my life seen an animal's face change like that poor sheep's face as the stream flowed on and the tension lessened; it was pure milk now, and a look of the uttermost relief came into her tormented eyes, presently she made a little gentle sound and turned her head feebly to the lamb. He was looking about puzzled—there was a new sweet smell somewhere, a smell that called aloud to his emptiness. He came weakly back to her and kissed her face; she moved him with her head toward the flowing milk, and suddenly the little chap understood; he flung himself upon the opened teats and learned the meaning of heaven.

The sheep farmer looked on, pleased.

"We've saved Watson a good ewe and a stout lamb," he said, "they'll be all right now."

"But won't the cuts heal up again?" I said anxiously as we clambered back into the sulky.

"O no! That son will keep them open; he'll see to that."

As we drove on swiftly to his farm for tea I looked back and saw the ewe turning into a white speck again. A happy speck, with a tinier speck, guzzling furiously.

Sometimes I believe that I like dumb beasts a great deal more than people; animals are not self-conscious, and they are full of unexpected character. During the War I was much interested in the tales of fox-farming in Prince Edward Island which were told round my fireside by a Canadian major. The beautiful silky black fox-skins spangled with white hairs on the rump which cost so much to buy were, he said, grown on fur ranches.

"Silver fox or black fox," he said, "whichever you like to call them; they are all the same."

"Do you mean?" we asked, "that these glorious furs are grown in captivity?"

He said they were; that the industry was a very valuable one and the animals most attractive and interesting to keep.

"Then you kill them—for their skins?"

"Yes," he said, "we kill them in the pink of condition when the pelt is at its best."

There was a deep unhappy silence.

"Do you eat lamb?" he asked. And we were answered and rebuked; abashed at the words we had not spoken.

"They live happy lives and go to sleep most peacefully in a lethal chamber. We do not hunt and trap and maim them."

One day near the Armistice he said to me very mournfully:

"I love this island; I wish I need not go back to Canada."

"Why don't you breed black foxes here?" I said.

"It's too warm," he answered.

"Not in the north of Scotland, surely," I said, and became in that moment the actual founder of the fox-farming industry in Britain. For from that flash of an idea he formed the Snow Belt Fur Farm at Alness of which for a time I was one of the directors. Garden study and travel took me far from the fox-farming development but while I was connected with it it was absorbingly interesting.

There were three risks that had to be faced by the young company. The first one was whether the foxes, sensitive, highly bred animals, would stand the sea-journey, the second whether they would settle down and breed in the softer climate, and the third whether the pelts would be good enough, supposing we ever bred any pelts, to stand comparison with the Canadian skins. It is old history now that all was indeed accomplished. The expensive breeding stock was brought over, seasick and frightened but alive, the animals found the Highland hills so homelike that they settled down comfortably and even bred a few pups the first year which was beyond all our dreams; and pelted out beyond all speculation; the damp Scotch cold ensured the same depth of weatherpile that the sea-

borne climate secures for the pelts in Prince Edward Island, and the mild Scotch summer does not scorch out, and shed out the summer coat, in the way the harsher Canadian sun does; the British silver-black fox rank very high among the world's best pelts.

I went up to Snow Belt Farm one New Year and stayed for a short while close to the work. I enjoyed the visit to that far romantic snow-clad place. The pens were set among the hills secluded from the public, and I cherished the privilege of being taken behind the scenes.

On the slope of a hill with fresh running water led separately to each pen, were the long ranges of wired fox-runs, with their puppy house and hospital pens complete; farther on the butcher's shop for feed and the office, with its clean shelves waiting for the years to fill them with famous pedigrees. Over the hill a brawling burn cut the range, and way down in a gully a hillside spring fed a projected beaver dam. It was no use putting the dam in the big burn as the time of freshets would sweep all construction away.

It was courting time among the foxes, a very serious and heartfelt business for, like pigeons, they mate for life, and they will not have a true-love foisted on them by any human. They choose for themselves. Their little bodies bred in captivity carry still within them the tameless heart of the wild. They will allow themselves to be fed, handled,

housed, and groomed; but in love and marriage they will not stand a profaning touch or tolerate a curious stranger's glance.

The manager of the ranch was going his rounds with the last feed of the day, and his form, leaning against the wind and driving snow, was a source of the liveliest interest to many black forms, padding silently to and fro across the pens. The Northern Lights glimmered fitfully on the sharp faces white with fresh fallen snow; round each warm eye was a space where it had melted and the black fur showed clear, looking as if the foxes wore motor-goggles. In each pen was a vixen and her dog-fox, and now and again a mating call would come chuckling across the burn from the far hill-side, where some wild Scotch red fox, serenaded, hopelessly enough, the cloistered beauties in the guarded fur ranch.

Conscientiously the manager passed on his rounds; unlocking the outer door he went into each pen, petted and talked to the shy, wild creatures, who knew him and his two assistants alone of all humans in the world: and having handled them awhile, fed them on raw rabbit, watching how they took it. Every action had its meaning to his experienced eye, and told its tale of condition and progress.

It would be an anxious time for him until June, when the pups he hoped for would be independent and able to look round for themselves. Foxes

are monogamous and very shy in their domestic life; from New Year till the summer no stranger would be allowed inside the ranch gates; and no sudden sound disturb their calm. Many were only just paired, and nervously he watched to see if peace reigned in each pen.

The blizzard deepened, drifting through the pens; he opened the last door but one, and Morgan, "the three-wheeled wonder," so named after a well-known three-wheeled runabout car, came limping up on her three legs. She had injured one as a pup and it had been amputated; away behind her stood her dog, watching her with jealous love, he preferred no one but himself to touch Morgan; his eyes glowed out of the quaint black circles like red embers.

Morgan shook the floating silver of her pelt free for a moment from the driving snow, silky and brilliant in the wind; she ate a lump of snow and then laughed up in the manager's face, nibbling his fingers for fun. She was the tamest fox on the ranch. At the time of her accident they had her in their own house to watch and nurse night and day, till she became the pet of the family and a most roguish little thief.

He patted her now tenderly, reminding himself how she would watch for his wife to leave the kitchen, then steal a loaf and race with it to their bedroom, where she would quickly dig up the linoleum and

cover it up, hurrying off to find more bread before she was discovered. Her sharp little laughing face, so like a toy Pomeranian, her patience under pain, her beauty as she grew up and pelted out at the first flush of cold weather, ran through his thoughts and made him warm to the pretty creature.

Wild and shy as he was, the dog drew nearer; Morgan was his; he wanted to be close to her. Besides the meat smelt good. His red eye glowed from the tray to the manager's face above it, as he slunk along, foxwise, with his long black brush held straight behind him. The white tip of it looked yellow against the untrampled snow.

He took the man's petting rather like a grace before meat, perfunctorily; and then trotted away to do a long run round and round the trees in the pen, with his "kill" in his mouth, pretending he had had a good day's hunting.

The manager watched until he saw Morgan was satisfied and had limped off into the wooden shoot which, twisted like a natural earth-burrow, led into her kennel.

She was a very handsome maid, and he dearly hoped she would give him a fine litter. Her mate was shy, but fond; the little household promised well as far is it went.

He locked the door as he went out, and passed the last pen, which was empty, with his empty tray. The sight of its deserted kennels reminded

The Trollop.

When Sibo arrived he had a stable-companion.

him of Morgan's father, and he hoped there was not so much heredity in character as in colour, for Charlie, Morgan's father, had been an outlaw among foxes, and had paid the death penalty for a crime. He had killed his wife.

"Morgan looks well," he said later on in the evening, sitting beside the pine log fire. "She's a sweet-tempered thing; I hope she will be a good mother."

"Charlie always seemed good tempered, too," said his wife regretfully. "Everyone liked Charlie."

"Can't understand what took him," said her husband. "He was the best father in the world. Why, I hadn't given him any eggs for ten days before Betty whelped, and directly the pups were born he was all up in the air with delight; as busy and proud as he could be. He went off and dug up three eggs at once, and rolled them straight away to the kennel. He must have hidden them for his babies, and you know how he loved eggs! He treated Betty as if she were a queen. I can't think why he turned on her."

"Betty was always a nagger," said his wife, thoughtfully.

"What makes you think that?" asked the man.

"Well, you remember that screechy little high voice of hers, and she was always chattering. I've seen Charlie go off, at times, and go into his kennel to get away from it."

Her husband gazed into the fire for some time before he replied. He was thinking. It is part of a good fox-man's job to keep his brain always alive to the psychology of those high-strung, inbred, valuable animals, and this was a new idea.

"I believe you've got it!" he said at last. "And I shall regret killing Charlie as long as I live! I did want to give him another chance, but it was a long risk to run. He might have had a bigger brain-wave, and killed the whole family as well as his wife next time, but I believe I should have tried him all the same, now I know that. Come to think of it, Betty *was* a shrew, and after the pups had grown big enough to be taken away he must have felt bad with her alone. He loved the babies. Poor old Charlie! She must have got him on the raw one day with just one word too much, and that did it!"

Morgan and her shy husband were out in the snow together sniffing the clean moonlit night for news of the countryside unguessed by man. The storm had dropped, and a silence that was almost shrill lay over the snow.

The dog fox knocked against her as they rounded a small bush together, and her balance, never secure, gave way. He stood beside her remorsefully as she limped up again, smiled at him, and licked

his face. There was nothing of the shrew in Morgan!

I told that tale once to a lady who was very shocked. She said she did not wear fur—or eat meat—or use "anything that had cost agony."

But she ought to have worn wooden shoes when she said it. And where is one to stop? We know now that trees and plants and flowers breathe, see, feel, and die in a convulsive shudder as the animals do.

She should not eat vegetables, either.

CHAPTER VIII

"A thousand glorious actions that might claim
Triumphant laurels, and immortal fame,
Confus'd in crowds of glorious actions lie,
And troops of heroes undistinguished die."

Addison.

CHAPTER VIII

CUPS OF GOLD

I AM glad to work for the National Garden Guild because of Edward. His broken young life made a shadowy pioneer link with its work; because of him that busy little office at 9 Gower Street is doubly precious in my days.

The young man lay on his back and stared at the ceiling; a sharp, fine face with immense blue eyes sunken in deep hollows, long thin hands, and a bony frame outlined under the blanket. He lay in a rapt stillness, in the stuffy little room; lay so still that he hardly seemed alive. He was waiting to "go into the country."

A couple of canaries hopped in a little cage by the window; it looked out upon a mean street through dingy lace curtains, the kind, proud, grimy curtains, filters of smoke and fog, which closed him and his from the eyes of the street and the outer world; kept their poverty and sickness, their happy smiles and dark distressful hours to themselves; the Veil of the Temple, behind which is the sacred secret place where the intimacies of living

are shared; that inner shrine of days we call home.

On the table near his bed lay a pair of earphones; presently a voice would come out of the air to take him into the country. Once a fortnight it came, a woman's voice about tea-time, speaking about flowers and gardens. It brought to him the green fields, the wind in the trees, and that freshness of the morning which he remembered as a lad. He had seen the grass in the local park perhaps a dozen times in the last three years; his time was spent in the drab bedroom, the front room looking on to the street, the best room; and there he fought out his end of the great war for freedom.

At seventeen he had been a keen and eager lad; ambitious to make a name and fame. With his scholarships it would be easy; with his zest for work and his passion to create beauty. He meant to be an architect—but at eighteen he was a sailorman instead in a minesweeper, the old *Walton Belle*. They made the ardent lad, with his keen sight a signalman; he was always on the bridge with the Captain and always getting wet. The North Sea was not exactly like the Thames: waves swept the decks almost continually, they had to keep going. When the watch was over they were not allowed to undress to rest (if sweeping). The lads had to sleep in their wet clothes; oilskins are not much good in spray and sleet.

The old *Belle* did her work gallantly, sweeping up hundreds of mines; till at last the mine gases which the enemy used to try and outwit these shallow, industrious minesweepers, caught the boy's lungs and burned a sore place in the delicate fabric of his breathing apparatus. His feverish vitality would have warned a trained observer of a predisposition to tuberculosis; and pointed to what the end of such a combination of exposure and gassing must inevitably be. But there was no one to take count of tendencies in those Homeric days. Men did the work they were given; and if it happened to be peculiarly inimical to their physique so much the worse for them. The work was done . . . at any cost.

When the doctors came to listen to Edward's lungs, that splendid roar of air rushing into great air-spaces like wind racing through a forest of trees—which is the inspiring sound of healthy lungs—had lost its free and easy movement; the music of it was spoiled by creakings, and little crinkly crepitations. He had "contracted T.B. on active service."

He lay very still on his back thinking of it all; now and again he turned his eyes to the clock. It would soon be time for the voice to speak again; the voice which made garden pictures and breathed wonder into the ugly mean room.

To-day was All Hallows' Eve. It was nearly seven years, he said to himself, just on seven years since the maroons had sounded the last great "All Clear." He had heard them in hospital, for he fell out two months before the end of the War. Seven years . . . and now he was twenty-eight and had done none of the things he meant to do; he had not written songs, he had not become an architect, and he had not made a lovely home for his old tired parents. One of his dreams had been that dream of a new home.

He set his jaw; the last hæmorrhage had been pretty bad. He must keep calm and cheerful, the thing he must do at any cost was to get well; if he died there would be no one to build them that pretty labour-saving home in the green place where flowers grew . . . nor his pension to help them—he must not die. He blamed himself for that last red warning. He had been in bed and felt tired; he did not want to sit up and yet he wanted something on the table, so he had stretched out his hand over his head to get it. How often he had been warned not to do that, or ever to attempt to pick up anything from the floor; he had done both and suffered for it each time. "Wit bought is better than wit taught"; he must never risk it again.

He had tried to get out to Africa when he had first left hospital. He had secured a job out there, and with what feverish thankfulness he had opened

the letter confirming it! How the raw, foggy London winter sped by, in dreams and plans! As the eyes of the Israelites had turned to the waters of the pool of Bethesda, so did his tormented eyes look towards Africa; in fancy he could draw the pure dry air already into his sore lungs and feel the healing of the days and nights ahead; with desperate eagerness he made his plans.

But the authorities would not let him through. Then he tried New Zealand, because he had a brother there, but once more the dreaded Tubercle Bacillus barred his way. The younger countries in the comity of nations do not want to offer sanctuary to the halt, the maimed and the sick. They want to build up healthy populations.

So he had found himself trapped in England; and at last as the Sanatorium disgorged him, back into this dingy street, with the front room, the "best" room, made over into a bedroom to save his breath going upstairs. Life had narrowed its border and closed in on him; the wide, tempestuous seas, the noise of waters, thrill of battle news, the terrible glorious exhilaration of living at the gates of death and glory, and even the bright open wards, the smiling uniformed nurses, the view of hills and pinewoods in front of the sanatorium, had narrowed into this room in a mean street in the London dockland, with his good old parents on parish relief and his sick pay to help them.

It was the fifteen shillings a week they each got which kept them in London; if it were not for that, if there were any way of getting a living they would have gone away; his mother said that when they first came to West Ham thirty-six years ago it was all fields and market gardens—stiles, too. In the yard at the back were two rose bushes, but they never bore any roses, only small sooty leaves; when he tried to grow anything it came up small and weak, made dirty by the factory smoke. That factory at the top of the street was always throwing out its dirty smoke and small cinders.

The clock drew near five and his mother was beside him.

"I wonder what flowers she will talk about to-day," she said.

"I wonder!" he mused. "Mother, I think I will write to her. I do think I will to-day."

"I should, love—it can't do no harm. You write to her if you are able to sit up again."

She soothed him, putting the earphones over his head carefully. She had reason to bless the wireless for helping her lad through many a terrible hour in his long fight; as he slipped farther and farther away from active life she noticed how he turned more and more to the Nature and Garden Talks on the wireless, loving their sense of close communion with the common pulse of life in everything that grows.

The young man's head lay patiently on the pillow with the hoop of steel over it; the ear bosses sticking out rather like an absurd nightcap; his blue eyes staring, hollow and forlorn, beneath it. She watched the sharp oval of his face with a knife in her heart; presently a warm smile came into the staring eyes and she crept away. The voice he wanted had dropped out of the skies and he was wandering again in the garden of dreams.

That night he wrote to me.

And so there was established between the sick sailorman who had never meant to be a sailorman, and the busy days of this writer-woman away in the distant Weald, a thin thread of communication.

Now and again among the bewildering demands of a large public there will come a letter or a person who speaks in the tones of the last sincerity; and these are they who may not be denied. I was not able to reply in the usual typewritten formula to the simple and cheerful letters of the young consumptive. They were so full of hope and plans that I judged him to be better than he was. After consultation with the household and various head-waggings and thoughtful mutterings about the ways and means of making an open-air shelter in the garden for him and of finding accommodation for his mother in the house, I told him to leave

the sooty streets, come to visit the garden of his imagination and take a long spell of clean air; I had nursed T.B. in the War and was not afraid of it.

His rapture—and then a long silence—made me tear time out of the days to get to Town and call.

I had no sooner arrived in London than a strike paralysed all transport.

I tried to borrow a car but they were precious as diamonds. Tried to get taken down to dock-land in an ambulance car, tried a score of things and failed everywhere. It was too far to walk but I had pretty well made up my mind to do that when suddenly I ran into a very grimy, weary, happy-looking Dick.

"Hullo," I said, "what are you doing—driving a Tube train?"

"No," he said. "I'm on the Flying Squad at Scotland Yard. Oh! Marion, it's like old times. I'm back in my own crowd."

"All flying men?"

"Yes—and gunners!"

Poor Dick. I had not seen him look like this for years. He had just taken his commission, a lad from Woolwich, when the War came which finished his soldiering. He volunteered for flying after the first wound, and then crashed in France. So I knew him best, through these many years, a delightful, whimsical but a winged spirit. Always fighting;

fighting poverty; fighting ill-health; fighting uncongenial surroundings. And gay withal.

"I am trying to get down to dockland to see a sick sailorman," I said, "I suppose you couldn't help me?"

But he did. He turned up at the Club with another fiery young gunner, one Templeton, in a fast racing car; the glass was all broken, and the gunner's face and hand were cut where a striker had jumped on the running board that morning—but he said it was "only their fun!"

So I was armed with a spanner in case of "fun," and the two of them took me to dockland after all.

He lay on his back in that dreadful little room, the tender old mother beside him, an icebag on his chest; and he whispered about the garden.

"What flowers will be out when I come?"

We made plans.

"Tulips!" I said. "Don't talk; just listen; you will come in a car to the gate of the garden and on each side of the path are cups of gold that smell sweet like honey—tall tulip cups, and purple lilac will be out, and periwinkle, primroses, narcissus and forget-me-not. You will see the irises come out, later on, in the long border near your shelter. . . ."

He listened: prone on the battlefield; his fight for freedom lost.

"Cups of gold," he muttered; and smiled upon me with dying eyes.

It was two years before I had courage to undo again that small packet of letters, and reconstruct our shadowy acquaintance, and learn its message. And now they all lie before me in their delicate scrawl, strewn on the desk. Never a word of self-pity in them.

"If I can I should like to paint a picture of your garden while I am there; is it too much to hope I shall be well enough to go to next year's flower show at Chelsea? . . . "

"Of my mother how can I write? I owe her everything."

"Fibrosis has mended a lot of trouble in the right lung, and about six months ago a patch of fibrosis was found in the left one about the size of half a crown; so let's hope it goes on spreading."

"I did not hear you to-day because mother had 'flu. . . . I watched the clock go on and wished like anything I could have heard you. I didn't want anything else. Just that ten minutes of flowers. Once a fortnight I listen to the voice of my dreamings. . . . "

"As beautifully as your daughter said to you on her birthday, 'Thank you for to-day,' so to my mother I say, 'Thank you for every day;' each day she gives me life again."

Cups of Gold.

"I am often in your garden: at night mostly. I hear a waterhen flap away as I walk near. . . ."

That letter broke off abruptly; there was a long silence and then the last one.

"You comforted me by your visit, and I received such a mental uplift that I turned from saying, 'This must be the end' to 'I'll try,' and I have tried. And won. I can stand now fairly well. I still believe as I have always done that I am yet to do something for mankind. What it is has not been indicated yet, but whatever it is I am determined to do it well. Au revoir."

I believe that very often our real life's work is done unconsciously. Edward thought his was yet to do. It never appeared to him that he had given so greatly of life, health, hope and love to mother, country and humanity, that he had made a shining place in the world; as much of the stuff of dreams and of ideals as those cups of gold he was never to see with his mortal eyes. His life lay round him in ruins; every hope foredoomed; he, who loved the frail beauty of the tissue and fragrance of flowers, died in a crowded city street cooped up in drab ugliness, where nothing would grow.

And to me, when I heard of the work of the National Gardens Guild and was asked to join the movement which devotes itself, with volunteer help, to showing those who love flowers how to grow them in cities and slums, there came the memory

of Edward, nearly spent, writing his last words . . . and I was glad to be allowed to become one of that band.

Now is that sailorman's work well done; for others shall touch his cups of gold.

CHAPTER IX

"He who shall hurt the little Wren
Shall never be beloved by men.

* * * *

The Beggar's Dog and Widow's Cat,
Feed them and thou shalt grow fat.

Every tear from every eye
Becomes a babe in eternity.

The bleat, the bark, the bellow and roar
Are waves that beat on heaven's shore."

William Blake.

CHAPTER IX

THE FAIRY

JOCK is a thoroughbred Dandy Dinmont; they are not very often seen nowadays. For some reason people prefer the offshoots of the Dinmont type, the scrubby-haired, prick-eared Scottish terriers and Cairns or the white-coated Sealyhams.

Yet none of them are as handsome as the original old variety; and none are of a warmer heart. Jock runs round our feet all day, a pepper coloured little fellow, with a wise, big head, straight muzzle, beseeching eyes, an ever-wagging tail, and broad feet on a bowed front built for digging out the "brocks" as his forbears did at Charlieshope long ago, in the days of Guy Mannering.

He is built low on the chassis, with a long, characteristic, badger-dog or dachshund line to the body, his back is a trifle humped at the end, and his hair grows so full on the big forehead that it has a domed look. His coat is half silk, half wire; where the light catches the silk it has a silvery light; the wire part is frankly grizzle, pepper and salt.

Dandy Dinmonts are a virile race, bred for sport, and staunch to the death to those they love; excellent watchdogs, with a great bell-note in the bark, which is surprisingly loud for their size. They are brimful of personality; you cannot teach a Dandy anything by beating him, it only makes him sullen first and then savage; but try an appeal to his intelligence, mixed with some affectionate patience and there never was an easier dog to train.

The outstanding feature of this most adorable of terriers is the large, dark, luminous eye; a beguiling, irresistible eye, a beseeching, languishing, devastating eye, which invests the business-like powerful little frame with an unexpected sentimentality.

Sir Walter Scott called the breed "Pepper and Mustard," Pepper for the grey grizzles like Jock, and Mustard for the tan Dandies. He speaks warmly enough, as we all remember, of the esteem in which he held his brace of those desirable companions not only for vermin killing but also for their intelligence and fidelity. To any who still read and care for Sir Walter Scott there is a touch of romance connected with the Dandy Dinmont dogs.

Jock and I go for a walk before breakfast every morning. No one ever comes with me but him; yet the early light is pale and clear as daffodils then, and the woods and lanes are lovely under it.

There is one thing I know about Jock which most people never guess. He is a poet.

He is really and truly of the essential matter of a poet. In the winter time when he cannot get out in the garden because of the storms of wind and rain howling up from the marshes and over the hills, he still buries his bones. He takes them industriously to a bricked floor and arranges them meticulously, side by side. Then he scrapes imaginary earth over them with the utmost vigour. His solid black nose squeaks like india rubber as he scrubs it along the bricks till it makes me go all gooseflesh because it sounds as though it must hurt him.

So busy he is.

After he is satisfied with the job he goes off and does not even *see* the bones. His imagination tells him they are buried. We stood them as long as we could once, for days and days while he passed them blindly by, and then we made gestures as if we wanted to rob his câche. He instantly flew to the place, full of anxious housewifely care, and hurriedly removed them to another part of the room. He scratched with his paws and nosed about in all that pile of imaginary earth till he reached them at last!

He dug them up properly. To him they were buried bones though the smelly things were lying there under his eyes on the bare bricks. When he was gone

out of the room we burned them and gave him some nice clean grapes for a treat; rich muscat-flavoured Honeypots from South Africa; he splashed them down with juicy rapture, and wagged a tireless tail when we told him he was our very own poet.

Jock likes my morning walks; he starts out in a dreadful temper of energy; barking, panting, rushing up and down, shooing the moorhens off the lawns and despitefully using my nice little box-trees. When once in the lanes he has a thousand errands; every rabbit hole must be smelt, the grey squirrel's nest must hear his reveillé, the disagreeable, disillusioned bitch of unimagined age at the top of the hill must receive with perfect indifference his masculine smirk, the optimistic pursuit of each early blackbird must crowd the other affairs.

There is not an idle moment. He collects burrs and brambles and other strange garnitures; and, when his pretty pepper-coloured coat is too uncomfortably tangled up, he will come to me with a prayer in his dark eyes and let me undo the thorny sprays; I make him easy again.

One day he found me a new acquaintance, all because he dressed himself up in bracken. I was walking along a rough woodland path when he emerged from the brake with a pair of wings. Somehow he had managed to get a spray of dead bracken fern tangled in his hair behind each shoulder blade so that he was running along, a most attractive

little blue-grey figure upon the grassy green path, with a golden brown wing spread symmetrically upon either side. It could not have been more prettily arranged if someone had done it on purpose.

The lace-like wings lifted gently with each stride of the busy forelegs, he had his nose to the ground, and was completely absorbed in tracking some wee beastie or other, but sport was not good that morning and he kept to the path, so I had a good deal of fun watching the little dog-angel flapping his ethereal pinions. Presently we met a stranger, and he was so amused that he had to stop and laugh.

"He thinks he's an aeroplane," I explained; "he did it all by himself."

"He is a nice dog, though," said the man, and I was surprised at his pleasant voice, for he looked rough. "You do not see those Dandies everywhere. You don't show him, I see."

It had never occurred to the singing child to show her dog, (he is her dog really though I think he believes he is mine, too.) I was puzzled by that remark.

"No, we haven't shown him; we did not think of it. But how do you know?"

"Well, his coat wants attention, doesn't it?" he answered reflectively, gazing at the angel who was now in full flight back to us, having become aware,

I suppose, of a stoppage in the familiar sound of my following footsteps.

"Does it?" I said, "I'm sorry about that; he seems quite healthy and his skin is clean and cool."

"Oh yes! oh rather! he's in the pink of condition. I mean it wants a trifle of grooming for the judge's eye. My word, he is a nice little fellow."

He stooped to handle him, and Jock rolled his brown eyes at me beseechingly. He hates strangers. I patted him, reassuring; and the man passed a quick, accustomed hand over the dog.

"He's beautifully bred," he said appreciatively.

"He has eleven champions in his pedigree," I said modestly.

"He'll be one himself if you give him a chance," said Jock's new friend, standing up and stroking his short, fair beard while he looked down at him. Jock had stiffened sensitively at the first touch, but was now wagging his tail violently and rubbing his decorated body against the man's gaiters.

"It's a trick he has learned from the cats," I murmured apologetically.

The stranger turned a pair of piercing blue eyes upon me; he looked rather like a sailor I thought:

"An observant little dog! They are most astonishingly clever. I had a Dandy once, I have never cared for any other kind of dog. If you

JOCK—"THE EVER-WAGGING TAIL."

THE FAIRY TRIMMED FOR SHOW.

want to show this fellow I will be very glad to groom him into show shape for you before you take him up."

"But I don't know where you live," said I, rather taken aback by the rate at which Jock was being hoisted into the peerage.

He smiled; with a line of very white, even teeth, sailorman's teeth.

"I have come to live at Apple-pie Cottage, over there where the wood is cleared, and there is a Bramley Seedling apple orchard. My name is Selwyn."

I thanked him, and Jock and I resumed our interrupted walk. I reflected I must tell the singing daughter all about it when we got back to breakfast, and see what she said.

There were bluebells in the woods. Long years ago when I was city-bound the sight of them on the rare days when I could go into the country was almost an agony; the desire to touch the cool sweet flesh of the flowers with the flesh of my longing hands was so keen that nowadays . . . now that I have won to freedom and live among flowers . . . I cannot be as harsh as I want to with the city dwellers who come to our woods and despoil them. I wish they could learn to pick with restraint, I wish they would not scatter the roads with the dead and dying flowers which we, who live with them, love so well.

But when I remember the pain of flowerless days, when I remember the sweetness which the bluebell woods fling into mean and arid lives, when I remember Mary and her Jim I have to think that the gentle flowers may even be glad to end their little lives untimely, for such kind service to unhappy town-bred people: starved for beauty.

There are charabancs which ply from the great cities all through spring and summer time, conveying the people for small sums of money for a few hours into the Delectable Lands; and once in his courting days Jim became very grand and treated Mary to a ride on a "sharrybang."

It was April; the gritty streets seemed grittier under a rainwashed sky.

"I've got a day off on Wensday," said Mary. "The missus's sister's comin' and she wants me late all next week so I got Wensday off to make up."

The young man swung the milk can reflectively, and leaned against the jerry-built back door.

"If she'd make it Thusday now, we might have a bit of a day together. Must it be Wensday?"

"I dunno. 'Spec so," said Mary. "I'll ask, let yer know termorror."

"Try'nd make it Thusday," he urged. "Ain't got anyone else, 'ave yer? Will yer come along o' me?"

A voice called from upstairs, and the pale girl turned away.

"I'll try for Thusday," she whispered, and fled.

Now and again, from the hoardings of tubes and railway stations, a poster calls with a clear voice to the people, of the spacious lands beyond the seas; and of the flowery woods and meads, nearer home—of the pleasant country places outside the cities, where daffodils dance under the boughs, and apple-trees bloom in May. Such an one had caught Jim's eye one winter, and he found himself staring at it, and thereafter wondering at times if such places really existed; he consulted two other fellow employees, but they agreed with him that "likely it was just pickshers," till the foreman broke out with enlightenment.

"Course they're real!" he said. "There's places like that everywhere outside towns—fields and lambs in 'em, and flowers every way you look—and cherries, lots of cherries down in Kent."

He spoke grimly out of a grim face, and there was an irritation in his tone, as though some memory had caught him.

"Can you pick 'em?" asked Jim curiously.

The foreman looked down at him. Jim was town-bred and built, short and wiry.

"Not cherries. Not easy, you can't. They grow 'em for market mostly. But the flowers you can, the wild 'uns."

He humped his shoulders and looked out of the yard; he was remembering things.

"The birds gits at the cherries, the raskills! They sing like a bloomin' band, in spring. . . . Get on with that job now."

The thought of the poster stuck in Jim's mind; once he spoke to Mary about it when they were at the movies. The villain had led his dupe, the hero, into a flowery garden, to rob him with the usual violence.

"Cherries grow there, lots of 'em," he said. "There's flowers growing wild too."

"'Course there is," she said. "I know that. Mother comes from Worcester. She often talks of the streets yeller with 'em. Plums it was, *she* said."

Jim became grand.

"Might go and see 'em," he said.

She jeered at him. "Costs money; it's a long way. Not but what I'd like to see 'em too," snuggling into the arm encircling her in the merciful dark.

And that also stuck in Jim's mind, so that he learned of those "sharrybangs"; and Mary's mistress gave her Thursday instead of Wednesday.

There is a place, though they did not know it, where the clanging highroad cuts across the Pilgrim's Way. That ancient pathway, trodden for centuries by the feet of the devout, wanders still across hill and dale till at last it ends at Canterbury; hard

to find for the multitude, easy to find for those who seek it yet, and sometimes trodden unwittingly by wise fools.

"Here's a little road," said Mary, her pale cheek already faintly flushed, her cheap, smart shoes smeared with unusual whitish muds, her small hat perched rakishly on Jim's round head, his cap in her hand.

The Way seldom goes clear for long; it is often smothered under brambles and traveller's joy, hawthorn and honeysuckle and brier-rose.

"It's clearer in there," said Jim presently, peering across at a pillared place of trees. Mary's high heels were sticking into the soft sticky chalk at every step, and coming out again with a plop like a cork. The flimsy papery uppers were getting scratched.

"Ain't doin' my best shoes no good," said Mary.

"Lummy!" said Jim.

He was looking into a wood full of bluebells.

These two city-emmets had come on just such a picture as the true country-lover seeks and does not always find. Fate had flung into their day a royal, a peerless, jewel. The wood was brimful of blue-bells in the time of cuckoo-call, just before the nightingales come nesting. The abundant flowers were spread in a haze; a mist of blue; belated windflowers nodded in secret dusky places, and the pale stars of a few primroses shone where the leaf-mould was deep and damp; green beeches made a

ceiling of jade under a deep blue sky, here and there the dark velvety green of a yew tree marked where the Way went on.

That which swept their veins was the urge of the saptide and the call of the spring; it made Mary cry out and then grow still; it struck Jim's common, decent, cheeky face into the nearest to awe it would ever know. They stood looking, looking; they were by the knees of the Great Mother; they, who had never seen her face . . . which is the face of death, and of birth, and of all the glorious changes.

"Oh, *lummy!*" said Jim.

"Ain't it pretty?" said Mary. "If they was wild 'uns we'ld pick some and take 'em back."

"I seen chaps with bunches like that on their bicycles, tied on their handlebars they was," said Jim—"of a Sunday."

"There's no one about," said Mary.

Timidly they went into the wood, treading the good leafmould so that faint strange scents of earth crept up into the air, sweet already with smell of the wild hyacinths; and senses, atrophied in self-defence by the stench of exhaust gases and the reek of close-herded humans, apprehended dimly a new delicious joy.

"Smells nice!" said Mary, picking bluebells for the first time in her life, furtively and then greedily, till her hands were full. Jim leaned

against a bole of a tree and watched the birds, the bees and the girl.

"Don't care for her ways," said Mary, bending over the blue misty earth. "Wish we cud stay here for ever. It's 'eaven."

"Wot's the matter with 'er ways?" asked Jim.

"It's 'er scrapin', grudgin' ways I mean. Scrapes the last drop o' gravy out o' the tin. 'No waste,' says she, and has the brown jelly off of the drippin' took off separate. She's a scraper."

"Well! Why not?" said Jim, "why not, if it's good jelly? Yer'll scrape fer me, won't yer, Mary?"

She stood up, her arms full of flowers, her flat, anæmic chest panting a little, her cheeks quite pink, her hair around her face and her blue eyes dancing.

"Smell!" she cried, but Jim had heard the pipes of Pan in her laughter and in the calling woodland birds.

"Give us a kiss," he said, snatching at her laden arms and chasing her round the grey beech trunks, unconscious of his eternal gesture.

"Oh, *carm* on," said Jim, and drew her down upon that royal counterpane to learn with her the meaning of the spring.

Why a Cockney milkman and a Cockney cook-general should have been taken into the Presence with all the panoply of beauty which kings and

poets, philosophers and wits seek vainly and with tears is more than I can say. Maybe it is truly easier for a camel to pass through the eye of a needle than for the sophisticated to enter the kingdom of love. These heard the call and followed, without fuss and protest.

Never as long as she lived would Mary really forget the scene of initiation, nor Jim quite lose that flash of vision when he found that his woman's eyes were blue as the flowers on which he had pillowed her head.

But not being poets, or of those who register and record emotions, they never phrased the wonderful day, or sang it, or shared it, or chewed the cud upon it.

It was getting near "sharrybang" time; a crescent moon showed through the beech boughs—a country girl and boy would have bowed to it "for luck."

"How do they grow?" said Jim.

"They has roots, silly," said Mary, sleepily, fondly.

He pulled at one to see. It left the bulb in the soil far below and came up in his hand, a long, long bleached stalk without anything at the end. Round them scattered far and wide, in the manner of the city-born who invade our woods each spring, lay the dead bluebells they had picked at noon; and dropped.

"Got no constitootion," said Jim, regarding them. He found his cap and put in it the one he had pulled up.

"*Carm* on," he said.

Mary limped on her absurd heels behind him down the ancient Way.

"Not much ter set up housekeepin' on, 'ave yer?" she said.

"You must be a bit of a scraper!" said Jim, the lanky bluebell outlined against a saffron sky insecurely threaded in his cap and oddly waggish.

O well! There were Jim and Mary. . . .

Here was Jock at my feet sniffing at a bunch of scattered bluebells! I could only hope as I gathered them up that they had made a holy moment in some town-sick soul.

Sounds of "vocalises" as I unlatched the garden gate reminded me I was late, and I hurried in, to find Dick drawing a wonderful design of polyanthus with a box of coloured crayons.

"Lesley has nearly finished your mat," he said, "and I expect you'll want to make her one next, so you shall have a special design. Get away, Jock!"

But it was too late. Jock had found a half-eaten apple dangling in Dick's left hand and had surmised an offering; he was already crunching it juicily under the table. He is always snatching things off Dick.

"There's something abnormal in that dog's passion for fruit," he said, testily, "doesn't seem natural somehow."

"We knew a Scottie once that ate strawberries; he would walk along the rows picking out the sweetest, but he would not eat oranges or grapes and Jock will," I said, regarding the culprit. I rather like his love of fruit, it seems a healthy preference.

"I know a woman who won't touch fruit in any form, and she is not a generous or a pleasant person," I went on; "she will never make her husband any marmalade or jam or fruit cake, poor man, but feeds him on treacle tart when he would like a fruit pie for a change. She eats cream all the time, and gets a bilious attack whenever the wretched man asks her to do anything she doesn't want to. Now I call that abnormal. No one can say Jock isn't good-hearted, anyway; and no one can say that female is. He is going to be a champion if Lesley will show him; he turned himself into a fairy this morning."

"You ought to get that dog a bitch," said Dick irrelevantly, and in came the good smell of steaming coffee to divert us from thoughts of lady-dogs.

The vocalises stopped, and down ran the rose-cheeked One, to breakfast, full of admiration for the hook-mat design.

"It's a nice pattern," she said, "I'll work out the amount of wool it will take."

I felt a bit nervous. These mats are not only very laborious to make but also exceedingly expensive in raw material. Lesley had *said* hers was my New Year's present beside my bed, warm for my feet in winter, and here was bluebell time! I perceived that I should presently spend a great deal of money to create for myself a lot of hard work. So I sought a diversion by telling of Jock's new career upon the Show Bench. It caused much excitement.

"I'll find out about the next show to-morrow when I get back to town," said Dick, "and I'll let you know all about the date of entries and when he must be benched and everything."

"Yes, and we'll take him to Apple-pie Cottage a day or two before, and see what has to be done," said Lesley. "That will be lovely. And O I say, we've found a wonderful bush covered with waxy white flowers that smell most delicious; it's quite new; when did you put it in Mummy? Dick and I have been leaning over it for hours, I never smelt anything so lovely; it's by the wattle fence."

I drew a long breath. The mat was forgotten.

"That, darling! O! that's viburnum Carlesii; it's nearly over now; it has been out for ages."

So it came to pass on a day that I set off in the crisp of the morning very gaily; I was going through

the woods to Apple-pie Cottage to fetch Jock, who was to win his spurs to-morrow at a famous Show.

I took a lead so that his brushed coat might be kept free from brambles and his feet as far as possible clear of the mud; the old house was drowned in slumber as I left, even the busy pigeons cooed with the velvet of sleep in their throats; and rabbits ran across my path lazily as if they knew Jock was not there to give chase.

I plunged into the sweet-smelling woods, and found Apple-pie Cottage, just as Lesley had told I should, snuggled in apple trees. It was one of those lovely little mellow houses with a roof of old red tiles and weather tiles shaped like scallops, the windows had leaded panes; there were roses round them, and masses of peonies each side of the stone path that led to the door. They were only bronze shoots now—but I could see what they would be soon.

Jock knew my step, for before I could knock I heard his high hysterical crying of welcome; he always greets us with a shrill ecstasy, most unbecoming to his sex, as if he is about to burst into tears.

The door was opened even as I raised my hand to the knocker, and Mr. Selwyn was before me, smiling good-morning. A fluffy-faced poodle rushed at me, and a sickness crept to my heart.

"Where's Jock?" I said, faintly.

"Don't you like him?" said the man, looking proudly at the thing that was sobbing and leaping round my knees.

It was Jock all right; his shrill cries of joy and his great soft, beaming eyes were all that I recognised; the rest of him was utterly distorted; he looked like an Aubrey Beardsley drawing, an affected over-dressed abortion.

"Whatever have you done to him?" I said miserably. "How long will it take to get him right?"

The man was really very good-natured. I was being most ungrateful.

"I see you like him in his natural beauty best," he said, fixing the lead on the dog's collar and calming his transports while he held him still, for me to admire. "So do I; but the fanciers like to see everything exaggerated; Dinmonts are by convention "trimmed" to accentuate the dome of the forehead, and the hump on the back, and the long arch of the tucked up tummy. Look at his great chest. He will want a lot of beating. I hope you will have luck."

To me the dog looked utterly horrible. No wonder people do not keep Dandy Dinmonts any more if they see them looking like that; I wondered why the dog-fancying folk should have distorted these nice, wholesome-looking terriers by trimming here and brushing up there till the noble

simplicity of the natural outline becomes a fantastic preciosity; it seems a shame to doll them up and spoil their character with all that sophisticated hairdressing. I took the lead and made a grab at my manners.

"It's a bit of a shock," I muttered, "but we are awfully obliged to you all the same."

"You hate me," he laughed, his keen blue eyes dancing, "When he gets to the show you will see he looks like all the others. But I agree that it's idiotic all the same. Can you tell me if there is any money in peonies?"

I looked at the great clumps of bronze that made an avenue to his front door.

"Yes, rather. The cut blooms are always marketable in such fine varieties as you have here. They last long in water you know, and smell very fresh and sweet. They love your soil, don't they?" He looked pleased.

"I bought this little place because of them when I gave up mines and engineering (so he was not a sailor!) I've always liked them: and I want to plant acres."

"They'll do well here, once you get them established," I said, taking the shameful apparition out of the gate.

He minced along beside me, wagging his absurd round poll at every rabbit hole, and sorely puzzled at the unusual lead.

It was hard to believe that the blood of this anointed fop traced its source to that wild farm on the edge of the Teviotdale Mountains where the rivers and brooks divide to East and West. I wondered if the farmer of Hindlee who took that celebrated original pack of stout-hearted terriers out after "rottens and tods and brocks" would recognise in this degenerate doll, a descendant of Pepper and Mustard.

I was utterly ashamed of him.

I remembered Dick's cryptic speech about getting him a wife. Bitch he called her, an ugly word. He was putting on awful airs, with that silly camel hump at the end of his back: he seemed to be growing more vain and nancyfied with every step. The elegant cats, with their delicate ways are his only standard of manners. He adores them. They are his dear companions, and he copies all their habits, some of which sit ill upon him.

The thought of a wife for him which would mean another dog in the garden gave me cold shivers; and then, in due season, of course there would be troops of puppies, all over the flower beds! . . . It had been hard enough to endure Jock's bad gardening. He was fairly well trained by now, but it had been at the cost of much temper and some wrangling with the Best-beloved, who seemed to think that I ought to be pleased to see him gambol through the flower-borders and bury bones where

the soil had been newly dug and planted with bulbs.

I groaned aloud at some of those memories, and the houri trotting at my side turned up a melting glance at the sound, from under a ladylike fringe.

Once I had waited months for a certain strain of ranunculus bulbs; and when they came had spent a rapturous morning putting them in a special, very suitable place, which I had first refreshed with barrowloads of fine sifted soil—rich light crumby stuff, with plenty of fine rotted manure in it; and sand which is precious in this region of heavy clay. I put the tiny shrivelled bulbs to bed very carefully with their wizened claws pointing downwards and thought of them now and again with a comfortable hospitable feeling;—well housed and well fed. I had done my duty by them.

There are hardly any flowers of the early summer which give a more gorgeous effect than the brilliant double buttercups; they generally sail under the generic name of "Ranunculus," and are classified as Double Turkish (or Turban), French and Persian; for the Asiatic species are far more attractive than the European ones.

When we see the white curtains of clematis montana flung over roofs and walls and trees in May, or the blue fragrant flowers of clematis Davidii spread bushily in the herbaceous border, or the royal purples of Jackmanii genteelly draped on

arch and pillar, it is hard to believe that these stately plants belong to the same clan as the gaudily coiffed heads of the turban buttercups. As a matter of fact those Russian ballet-heads, swathed so whimsically in a hundred different and all delightful colours, are not only related to the clematis family, but also kin to delphiniums and larkspurs, Christmas roses and columbines; and this as well as the much more likely anemones!

All the florists' buttercups make admirable cut flowers for the house, or for sending to friends from one's garden. The giant French strain, in semi-double arrangement, shows the central black boss very effectively; and the profusion of flowering makes brilliant patches of colour in the beds, in which this feature is very telling. One of the most delightful French buttercups is *couleur café*, of a coffee-brown shade. I saw a bunch of that one last year and amused myself by buying it and then making up the various delicious harmonies to which the colour lent itself. Placed with black and puce it was glorious. It woke to an entirely different expression with buff, lemon, orange, and gold ranunculi; and changed again like any chameleon when placed with pink and rose and black ones. The "black Turban" is really crimson black, as the "black" tulip is. A very valuable foil for enriching and intensifying most of the colour harmonies.

There is a pretty name for the double white French ranunculus—aconitifolius plenus; the country people call its small, pure white flowers "Fair Maids of France," and in my part of the Weald they call the single yellow satin-fine buttercup of our meadows "Fair Maids of Kent." There was a great deal of traffic between France and Kent in the olden days when Rye was still a port and the Admiral of the Rother had plenty of work to do; one can well imagine how the names arose.

I was pleased with my ranunculus border.

Then one day Jock came in with an enormous smelly bone, and when we shooed him out something fell off it.

"Whatever is that?" said the singing one, looking curiously at a round plump body with fat fingers splayed out. The poor little bulb had been doing well on my good fare.

I hurried out to the ranunculus place and found a large hole, the size of a newly disinterred bone . . . he always prefers to ripen his bones in special rich soil. . . .

I was getting near to disliking the little wretch when the blood of "Charlieshope" came to his help and won my heart for ever.

The lawns and beds had been riddled with moles; I tried one thing after another, and nothing was any good until one day the ancestral knowledge of what

is due to earth-burrowing creatures woke up in the dog and he set himself to clear the place. He became extremely popular forthwith, but the idea of more of his kind was intolerable. With all my might I determined never to get him a wife.

As though he had followed the thoughts of the big human by his side the poor, silly-looking object fawned up at me, currying favour. I unlatched the gate to see what our reception was going to be.

CHAPTER X

"Once more the heavenly power
Makes all things new,
And domes the red-ploughed hills
With loving blue;
The blackbirds have their wills,
The throstles, too."

Tennyson.

CHAPTER X

PILGRIMS OF LOVE

THERE was no one to see me play truant. Jock and his mistress had gone to town at a most unusual hour to attend his novice Show, both of them all dressed up and ready to face any judge.

I saw them off at the gate, rather solemn and important, and decided I liked my daughter the better of the two. She looked like what she was—a nice young female dressed to attract, but I still could not bear to look at the fellow beside her. My eye slipped away from his continually—that top-knot, that mincing waist, that exaggerated hump . . . like a Victorian lady's bustle.

Dick and Tods were going to meet them in London, to share the glory of the great début.

Thinking of Dick reminded me of the ponds; I went to look at some long skeins of black worsted that had got tangled up in the weeds, as though a kitten had played with a ball of dark wool and left it all in a worry of loops and knots in the water among leaves and stems. It was a newt's

nursery. They lay their eggs like that, in long strings.

The frogs' eggs are always by the banks of the ponds in clusters of globules, each with a black speck which will be a tadpole; as usual I found they had been trying to hang their great egg clusters on the water forget-me-nots, which are too heavy for the delicate plants, and so they pull out large lumps of root and break the stems of sprays in bud leaving them to float forlorn upon the water. I like the frogs well enough, they are amiable creatures rather sudden in their movements in the summer dusk, but the toads are my best-beloved amphibians.

They are great friends to my flowers, living as they do entirely on slugs and destructive insects.

My most particular toad lives in a very neat round hole on the sunny side of the gnarled stump of the old pear-tree, the jargonelle. There are two yellow roses by the stump to make it lovely in its decay, an Emily Gray and a Mermaid. They wave over-head and make a bower of gold all through the summer and autumn. On Valentine's Day snow-drops nod there and later the golden daffodils; the toad has found himself a very picturesque home. When he is "at home," so to speak, he receives callers with an air.

We lean over the hole and ask each other if he is in; at the sound of our voices there is a bustle

and he comes to the door, panting, to give us how-do-you-do out of a pair of very brilliant eyes—intelligent, observant eyes. After being stroked gently on the back, and talked to a bit, he yawns and goes home again. Sometimes he is not at home in the social sense, and he sulks in the darkness far away from sight. He comes indoors occasionally, in wild weather, into my study. . . .

There is another larger toad, with eyes like yellow topaz, and he lives by the old quince tree; but I think he is a she—because she is a timid, mistrustful toad; women are sometimes more frightened than men; she puffs up at us, and spits in an unfriendly way whenever we make neighbourly advances.

Some people do not care for toads, chiefly, I think, those who live half-lives in towns or cities, some even fear and dislike them. One will own, readily enough, that the heavy limbs in their drab-coloured warty skin, are not at first attractive, but after a while the point of view changes, and the thought of ugliness passes away as we learn the habits of this good companion of the dewy borders. The lumbering innocent lives kindly among the plants we love, rendering service with such placid industry that we grow to look for, and to *like* that heavy waddle—and the bright, friendly, watchful eyes!

My toad leads a very steady, lonely life in his rose-embowered house all the year round, except

for one wild moon when he is touched with the ancient madness of the spring. He sleeps away the cold winter months, deeply embedded in his chosen hole; in the warm weather he comes out at evening time to set about slug-catching, staying at home all day in his moist cool house under the rose.

Once a year he leaves his home, with all its familiar surroundings, to make the perilous pilgrimage to the pool of his birth—where the life-force compels his return. It is a call irresistible as the call of death itself. . . . There are two ponds in my garden, and perhaps he only travels a little distance to one of these. But I have never seen him set forth upon that journey, and his chosen pool may well be farther away in some distant field or garden. A great many toads and frogs *do* come to my garden as the strange and moving music of still spring evenings tells us every year.

The frog-music starts earlier than the love-songs of the toads, who hear the call about a week or so after the nightingale and cuckoo have arrived. At least they do here in Kent; and I expect that all the world of toads stirs at the same hour everywhere. It is some message from the sun that these heavy, leather-coated servants of the garden receive! Each in his lonely hermitage under a stone or by an old stump, feels that ray strike which says it is

the hour for eggs to hatch, and at that compelling note each solitary is stirred to take, immediately, a long, perilous journey—often a mile or two and sometimes more, to the pool of his birth.

From all quarters of the land, from wood and wold, hill and down and garden, the amphibians in their hundreds march at the magic call of the sun to the temple of their desire. A strange, an ancient pilgrimage. Many, of course, perish with beak and claw; numbers are crushed under foot, or run over, when crossing roads; but the madness of love is upon them, and nothing matters but the gleam of the pool of their choice—where junketing, carousals, music and revelry await.

The wind-harps sound in my garden then indeed: the soft spring evenings are filled with the purring noises of the ponds and lakes where the toads are having their parties and balls and banquets; marrying and giving in marriage. After mating and feasting are over they feel the home-call once again.

I often think of my own particular toad sitting, rather jaded, by some far off pond and saying to himself that he is tired of crowds and noise and married life; I can imagine him feeling homesick for his own rose-bush, for the cool roots of the old jargonelle pear-tree, and the peace and quiet of his own comfortable hole.

So they turn themselves once more to the long and dangerous journey home again; each toad to his own place. When silence has returned to the ponds we can find the strings of toads' eggs, like necklaces of dark, wine-coloured beads set in a chain of transparent quicksilver, much more elegantly arranged than the untidy heaps of the frogs' eggs. There they are in the water, left to the ministering warmth of the sun which will presently turn all these inanimate beads into ardent wriggles of tadpole life; they, in turn, will mature into proper toads, and leave the water, to find at last comfortable holes of their own on dry land.

W. H. Hudson, the great naturalist, tells us how he met a toad on a high down one day, travelling back from the revels to his hermitage, in the direction of Salisbury Plain; and he makes us a word picture of the dark toad, with shining topaz eyes, on the velvety green turf gay with the little flowers of the chalk hills till we can see him, "almost beautiful, among the variously coloured fairy-flowers." Hudson stroked the traveller, and won his affections by helping him to a dinner of flies. It is not at all difficult to make friends with newts and toads, and even snakes, by stroking them on the back, gently, with the tips of the fingers. They get to know one very quickly.

The way the toads live is a queer, self-absorbed business . . . pursuing their lonely, useful lives

among our plants moon in moon out, with that one shattering break in April from the peaceful monotony of their slug-hunting nights.

I did not envy my lassie her journey to town this balmy spring day, it was happier to be in the garden among all its busy intimacies. I called at the toad's house, but of course he was not in; he was lost in a crowd of sybarites somewhere, garlanded with roses of fancy and trolling his ditty by the hour together, fondling illusions, poor foolish heart.

There was glamour in the air, and a slender dancing light; the pigeons were making a lot of fuss, strutting about with their brilliant bronze and copper chests thrust out and cooing; I loitered by them watching the bereaved gallant bustle in to the nest where his recovered pretty sat on her eggs—he sent her out to stretch her legs and look about for a cropful of feed, while he settled himself on the two warm globes. He was always very punctual in his relief work, and she also (after a few hours' rest) in her return to duty.

The air was full of the sound of birds, a fine gossamer fabric of sound woven in and out from tree to tree; by and by the rich full notes of the nightingale will pierce it and rapture will usher the May.

On the bank of the dell where wild orchids grow among the bluebells I found a glow-worm drinking

slug-gruel. She was a fine large, lady glow-worm and mighty busy with her meal; there is nothing of the worm in her appearance, and at night, when the steady brilliant flame of her is alight, she is all a mystery and a fairyhood.

The peonies were past the red-nose stage, and had turned themselves into bronze shoots; they reminded me of the mining engineer who said he had bought a pretty little cottage in Kent because the path to it lay through borders of peonies! It seemed an excellent reason to me, but unlikely in a keen-eyed, rough-featured miner. I wasted a minute or two thinking about him. I knew his peony path would soon beat any display in my own garden because those of his were old-established plants; if he planted as he threatened and grew them for market he would have the joyful adventure of cutting peonies by the armful; the petals brush against one's face with a cool sweet touch like the skin of a child; there is something very dewy and fresh about those flowers; we do not grow them enough in England; they know better in America and Canada.

The Trollop discovered me idling, and sidled against my ankles; she was looking very hopeful. With a great deal of care we found her a lordly prince of the blood to wed after her last escapade. But it had been a business; we put her in a basket, raucously distraught between the surprise of this

strange and moving tabernacle and the pangs of her amorous need which wrung from her ill-disciplined soul every few minutes a loud complaining.

We took the country lanes full of the morning freshness, winding through the neat hedgerows mile after mile till at last we embarked on a "local" train and jogged along a single track through orchards and hop-gardens to Paddock Wood, where we changed and took a handsomer train to Tonbridge; and there again dismounted to study the philosophy of patience and wait for another to Redhill which is a dowdy station; there we spent a lively time learning the smells of train smoke, and the pitch of engine whistles, while we waited for yet another train to Guildford. We settled down into the obstinate patience of people who have a job to do and must get through with it.

But at Guildford all our world was changed. A smiling lady stood waiting for us with a car. She was famous for her cats, and it appeared, as we spun along the lovely Surrey roads lined with golden gorse, that she had two Sultans in her cattery. One, a young bachelor with a very pale coat, and one the lordly, father-of-many, "Simzo," son of champion Bonzo ; half brother to our Sibo.

I was indifferent about which husband our cat espoused; so she was introduced to the bashful lad, and promptly fell much in love with his delicate colour; but he eyed her advances with the utmost

alarm, and when she uplifted her voice in an amorous song, the youth fled, terrified, from his admirer, who was ultimately carried, greatly affronted, to visit Simzo the Magnificent.

In the intervals of comforting the despised Trollop that potentate took occasion to tell his mean-spirited rival exactly what he thought of him every time he caught sight of him through the wires. It was not as though he minced matters, either, he said a great deal, and the sanctimonious young fellow was much astonished. That was weeks ago; now here was the pretty body of the little cat, wasted so often in riotous living, globed at last with worthy increase. We all looked upon her with interest and a good deal of fear, too. A foster-mother from a cottage up the hill was bespoken to take on her family as soon as she showed signs of deserting it as usual; we did not trust her in the least, nor did we really care for her; she was a dreadful character with her appetites, and her un-motherly ways. But at any rate this time we had taken a great deal of trouble to make her travail of some value to the beautiful world.

I patted her sleek dark head, and went about the job I had longed to do for days past; days of direful writing, imprisoned in my study and afraid to look out of the window for fear of being enticed away. I had been longing to get out to crumble the surface of the soil, working warily among the

springing bulbs and delicate green tips of delphiniums, peony shoots, forget-me-nots, hardy geraniums and garden campions; and now here was my chance of a truant day.

A crumbly soil lets in the warm sun-rays and ventilates the earth, so that the millions of friendly microbes in the soil can get the oxygen they need to keep them lively and healthy to do their good work for our plants. The soil we turned up in rough clods before Christmas that the frost and wind and rain might work upon it, had been breaking up into a beautiful texture under the warmth of this kind sunshine, and the great upward movement of the sap could be felt on every side.

A river of life gushes up from the earth at the touch of the sun, a living stream of energy—every stem, every trunk, every leaf-bud tingles with it so that nothing can stay still, everything must move, must grow, must face the life-cycle of another year. It is not possible to live with a garden and remain cold to the poetry of this stupendous ebb and flow, to be untouched by its mighty rhythms. The sally-willows had flushed, the dogwood reddened, the blades of the irises were pushing up clean-cut and sharp.

I went about my work with a will, happy under the shadow of my old roof-tree. The smell of earth came up to me, the song of the birds, I thought

again about the toad on Salisbury Plain; and W. H. Hudson. He has left a magic behind him; no one can look at birds in the old way without any understanding, if they have read his books.

And to any who live in close communion with all his works, as I do and many another, the woods of Hampshire and the wide spaces of Salisbury Plain are almost holy ground. His spirit is strong still with all who love Nature. It breathes about the brakes and coverts, protecting the wild birds he loved, and of which he wrote with so tender and so stern a pen. There is nothing sentimental about Hudson's bird books, but they are sweet and they are strong. There is not one affected or artificial word in anything he wrote.

And that thought pulled me up with a round turn to a fit of memory, remembering the Ghent Exhibition; so that once more the Trollop brought her heavy sides to rub against my idle hands. It was there that I learned how flowers can be theatrical, posed and *loud!*

It was a gorgeous sight to mount the great wide stairway into the vast hall upon an incredible brilliance, a panorama of dazzling living colour. Beyond banks and plains of azaleas a wide sheet of water fell into a large pool, and the water was tinted blue! The huge roof was hung with festoons of flame and orange ribbons; the sun, shining down through these ribbons, upon the blue water,

made soft shifting gleams of colour, like mother-of-pearl on it. It was interesting and effective; not at all simple.

When we went down into the body of the Hall we saw why the blaze of colour was so terrific; the Ghent azaleas are famous all over the world, and we were looking into what they call the azalea palace. There was every shade of red, rose, flame, orange and yellow in the varieties, and the plants were all so close-pruned that each one was a mass of bloom, with hardly a leaf to be seen. They were like lovely ladies very tightly corseted and curled and painted, all on show, very well-mannered, without one single natural gesture among the lot!

I like azaleas—but I would never want to grow them like that; as we stood and looked I remembered a garden at Goudhurst where they grow in thickets and walks and spinneys exactly as they want to, in a rich untidy luxuriance of leaf and blossom. In that garden they are very noble shrubs, worth a body's while to possess, worth the waiting for, worth patience and money and land to grow them, and worth travelling a long way to see.

Sibo came hurrying down the path to find the Trollop; he had a young rabbit for her, and was making harsh, muffled cries with his mouth full of fur to call her. The little bunny hung from his

jaws, and the cat carried its head high to keep its long hind-legs from trailing on the ground. His violet eyes flashed blue sparks as he came; he was the embodiment of grace and of strength—the successful hunter. They went off amicably together to discuss his prowess, beautiful Sibo and the rather disgusting Trollop.

I found the Varmint beside me. After that lithe and exquisite body this woman's depressed me.

"Lunch is ready," she said.

I followed her morosely. Time flies in a garden. I had no idea it was so late, and why didn't she wear something livelier than this heavy, long, brown cloth garment? Her eyes gloomed under the shaggy brows like holes in blankets—there was no flame about the creature. She put her hand on the lintel of the door—and my cruel mood was gone.

The poor hand; rough with work, a little hand—red and hardened.

It hung there for a moment on the door-jamb, etched itself and moved indoors, leaving me with a discomfortable picture. Here was a home kind enough and willing enough to make her happy, but somehow she kept outside all our sympathies. I went in pondering.

"Would you mind if I don't eat with you?" she said, "I would like to go out, and I can just catch a 'bus."

I agreed with alacrity ; it was a lightsome matter to be relieved of those heavy brows opposite me. Like bushy thickets they were.

"By all means. What is there for dinner? I'll see to it and you need not hurry back."

There was a fowl it seemed. To be steamed. An old fowl.

The joyous hours fled on wings; I planted scores of gladioli, hid the afternoon mail unopened on my desk, got hot and tired, happy and grimy, when I saw Mr. Selwyn coming up the path.

"There now! I'll have to get him tea," I thought inhospitably.

"I do not take tea," he said. "I just wanted to know if you have had any news of the dog."

"No, not yet," said I, much relieved. "It's too early."

He looked thoughtful.

"It crossed my mind that your daughter might have wired if he had done anything sensational."

It had never occurred to me.

"How are your peonies?" I asked. He shot me an amused glance.

"I don't want tea, but I would like to talk to you. Will you go on with your planting. I'll help. I am quite handy with a trowel."

That was a good idea. I began to like the man; most men stand and watch me work, and fidget me.

"These are primulinus hybrids," I started off joyously.

"I know; descendant's of the one Dr. Fox brought from the Zambesi: they'll make a great show here. Do you ever grow them from seed?"

I fell headlong into his trap, and babbled for an hour or more, enchanted to discover a knowledgeable helpmeet and to observe the quickness and thoroughness of his planting. My voice came back to me at last, as out of a hollow space; it seemed I had been doing most of the talking.

"You know a bit about gardening!" I said as we picked up the empty bulb bags.

"I've read your books," he said.

"Have you been currying favour?" I asked.

"Yes."

I laid down the trowel with a sigh.

"What do you want?"

"I want to cure an old hurt."

That sounded a lengthy business. He must be wanting help over something important. Some trollop I expected.

"Let's tidy up first," I said.

So we tidied away the trowels and trugs.

"Now I've got to put a fowl in the pot, so you can mix yourself a cocktail and watch me."

"I say, do you mind telling me if Dinah is still out?" he asked.

"Yes," I said, profoundly astonished. Whatever had Dinah been doing now, for heaven's sake . . . some clumsy piece of well-meaning stupidity? And how did he know her name so well?

We went into the house and he told me his tale.

CHAPTER XI

"Bitter, alas, the sorrow of lonely women,
When no man by the ingle sits, and in the cradle
No little flower-like faces flush with slumber:
Bitter the loss of these, the lonely silence,
The void bed, the hearthside void,
The void heart, and only the grave not void:
But bitterer, oh more bitter still, the longing
Of women who have known no love at all, who never,
Never, never, have grown hot and cold with rapture
'Neath the lips or 'neath the clasp of longing,
Who have never opened eyes of heaven to man's devotion,
Who have never heard a husband whisper "Wife,"
Who have lost their youth, their dreams, their fairness,
In vain upgrowing to a light that comes not."

Fiona Macleod.

CHAPTER XI

THE BONDED DAY

SITTING there in the chintz-covered bucket chair, with the light of the log fire dancing on his trim beard shot here and there with grey, in the historian's manner I reconstructed the story from his dry clipped sentences. He made the thing live, in an unembroidered fashion. What amazed me as I listened and filled in the gaps, was the sensitive withholding quality that Dinah had showed under the searchlight of sex. That revealing urge, which betrays the secret self. I will tell the tale as my mind saw it ; not in the curt words in which I heard it.

He began by telling how he met her again. He was going down the Strand, and I could picture the scene—streams of faces pouring past as usual; anxious pinky white Northern hemisphere faces; young and old, fat and thin, shrewd and stupid, kind and cruel, intent and vacant; all bleached by fog and smoke, rain and cloud to that pallid complexion common to certain plants which have been grown in dark-

ness to make them delicate—sea kale, rhubarb, celery and such.

Threading his way through the hurrying people went Edmund Selwyn with the goldy bronze of tropic suns upon his skin ; his heavy head thrust forward on heavy shoulders; long legs in baggy tweeds; long narrow feet in brogued shoes; long narrow powerful hands; out of the deeply-tanned face blue eyes, in uncanny contrast, gave the only clue to race-claim with the blanched office workers and Tube straphangers jostling past him. These lived under the North Star and he the Southern Cross; whatever might be their city-bought advantages, this man seemed to have all the gains in health and poise; he walked the populous streets with a difference; as if he were more used to veld and prairie, backwoods and mountain passes, than these unyielding stone pavements and the city streets.

Past the Cecil, the Savoy, Simpson's; across Wellington Street towards the Law Courts, and the Middle Temple, where the lawyers waited for him with a final wrangle before he got the terms he meant to have. When they gave in he would sign the contract—not till then.

He looked at his watch, he must not be late. The " Big Noise " on the Board of Directors was coming to this appointment; a word from him and the stiff terms he was asking would go through. Re-

mained, therefore, to win this last fight. He sickened for the open seas again, the long trail into the blue, and this new job, the biggest yet; big enough to be the last if he felt like resting.

He bored his way along, impatient to be at grips with these hard-faced lawyers and get the thing settled. He was like that; knew what he wanted and went for it; it had always been so since the difficult days of small beginnings when they had tried at home to herd him into the City, and make a clerk of him. At that he grinned. He shook his shoulders and strode along past the Law Courts, turning so suddenly under the archway to the Temple that he bumped into a thin woman and nearly knocked her down.

"I say—I am so sorry!" he said catching her arm apologetically as she stumbled. A white face looked up wrathfully.

Across the years those two looked into each other's eyes again; and he knew her first.

"It's Dinah—by all the gods! It's Dinah Lee —as I live."

She searched his face, trembling and startled, with blank, vexed eyes; the bronzed face bending down to hers seemed to radiate some of the sun-heat stored in its cells, something warm and strong but unfamiliar; it smiled, and suddenly she clasped her hands.

"Teddy! Teddy Selwyn! You've come home!"

He looked down on her while the seconds slid by. Fancy running into her like this; this woman of all London's millions . . . of all of them, this one woman! It was odd. Dinah who filled a queer, unusual niche.

Throughout his life Edmund Selwyn knew what he wanted, and went for it; and sometimes he had wanted women. He was no beast; he "asked pretty and played pretty," and so, prettily, he had always been given. Except once. This girl had made her own terms with him. In the hot tide of arrogant revolt, in the thick of the fight he put up for his career, in the splendid battling days of flaming youth, in the full flood of hope and ambition when the whole world must be his in his strength, he had held her faint under his lips while she cried with love, with the exasperation and despair of passion.

"Make something different for us, Teddy; make something out of what we feel different to everyone else."

"If you want something different we won't ever make another appointment to meet! That'll be different!" he had said; and never forgot for the rest of his days what truth can do to a woman impassioned.

"Then we won't!" she said, and slid out of his arms, "I will never meet you again, except by accident."

She had kept her word. For months afterwards he had hunted for her, but she had changed her job and rooms in the bitterness of her pain and pride. Lost, she became the deeply desired, and he sought for her with agony; but it was nearly a year before they met again, and then they had made their strange bond.

He had seen her, he said, buying a bunch of daffodils from a flower-woman in Piccadilly and then:

"When I touched her arm she looked round with such joy in her eyes that I thought the nonsense was all over and we were going back to our old terms."

He said those words to me, slowly, he put his hands in his pockets and strode up and down the room awhile, thinking.

I did not ask what he meant by "old terms." It was none of my business. Perhaps they had been lovers. Or again, perhaps they hadn't.

She had left him at the end of the day, refusing to give her address, or to say what she was doing, or make any future appointment.

"In the drift of life we shall meet again" she said, weeping in his arms.

He was angry and impatient with her. But a thought came like a flash, and he uttered it.

"When we *do* meet, wherever it is, whoever you are with, in what land soever, swear to me

you will leave everything, Dinah—business, pleasure, home, people, and spend the rest of that day with me!"

He thought he had suffered; but she knew best who bled in the fight for love.

"I will swear it if you will swear, too, Teddy." And they had sworn together.

Once again they met, two years later; she was in a great hurry and looking very pretty. But again she kept her word; and now they had met for the third time.

"I can't get used to it all in a minute, Dinah! What a lot to hear and say. . . . I haven't been in England for more than a fortnight, I'll be off again as soon as nothing, haven't been home for years, and of all the world I run into you."

"You've changed," she said, slowly. "You've grown older and harder and browner and bigger."

"You haven't!" he said gallantly, and put his arm in hers, turning towards King's Bench Walk. She appreciated the lie; knowing well how the difficult struggling years had ploughed their lines upon her, and sharpened her angles.

"Where shall we go, Ted?"

He stopped short; an old rage took him by the throat; rage at her inconvenient ways. This woman had a knack of denial; he had to keep this appointment; he could not forgo that; yet the terms of the oath came back clearly:

"Leave everything, business, pleasure, home, and people."

It was he who had dictated it.

He coughed. What could he do? That pride of hers . . . .

"I don't know, Dinah. What about dinner at the Savoy and then a theatre?" His eye travelled swiftly over her. What a rotten piece of luck . . . he must get into that office.

"I'm not dressed for the Savoy. Let's do something simpler."

"All right. Anything you like. Just let me run in here and explain to my law-dogs, there's a dear."

They were at the steps of the office; he was five minutes late; birds strutted on the stones at their feet and green plane trees waved over their heads.

She stood still very suddenly.

Something in her attitude warned him. Bitten deep into this man's subconscious mind was the memory of her inviolate integrity and pride. She had scourged him with scorpions, unforgettably she had been stern. She would go straight off if he left her now, and he would always have to remember he had broken the bond and put business first . . . damn it. What a thing to happen to a fellow! He might just as well have met her an hour later. A groan broke from his soul, and turned itself into a laugh.

"No! Of course, I can't do that. That's out of the bond. Come along!"

The woman lifted her face, and under the pallor was a glow; her eyes were warmly brown, soft and beaming; Edmund Selwyn told me then that he felt as if he could see the material of the years slide off her body like a cloak, baring the young, clear ardent girl of lost dreams to the eyes of his heart. She was transfigured before him, re-created in joy.

"Have you a very important appointment, Ted? I'll wait for you."

What had he missed all these years? The woman was a giver, generous as well as a flame. But once more the lesson she had taught him stood a test; he remembered he had felt a second of hesitation in her manner when they met that last far distant time.

"Where were you going that day we met in King's Road twelve years ago?"

"To the Registrar's Office," she said.

"To be married?" She nodded.

"And are you married?"

"No! No! He was very cross. I did not come to the Registry Office, you see."

"Were you sorry?"

"No. I have always been very glad."

"Dinah! You're great. Let us drive down to Frensham and dine by the lake." All our lives we seek Love; most of us lose the sub-

ſtance which is the spirit of it, for the fleeting shadow which is the flesh. It dawned upon the man as the hours sped by, that this troublesome woman with the great capacity for withdrawal and silence was still the moſt desired and rareſt creature of any he had ever known ; and that she had given him more than anyone or anything else in life.

She had made an ordinary affair into an adven- ture of the spirit; she had made gold of his dross, she had sublimated desire. She had indeed " made something different for them," and with no help from him. She had taught him to love.

As midnight drew near and they muſt part, he realised at laſt, humbly enough, that but for her he had never caught the fainteſt glimmer of a holy and immortal flame; for most women leave their lamps untrimmed, and have loſt the light. . . .

He did not tell it to me like that; but that was what his dry difficult words meant.

They talked of his work and of hers; he looked at her thin face, and cheap, simple dress as she told him she was now making " quite a good living as working housekeeper to a writer, a woman who writes on gardens and broadcaſts garden Talks."

He told her how somewhere near his mines he always managed to grow a hedge, or a bush or two, of heliotrope.

" There's the beginning of a gardener in me," he said.

"You grow it for your mother's sake, Ted! And for yours and hers, I, too, always wear it when I can. You called it Cherry Pie."

His mind travelled back to the old garden in Devon, to his mother who had loved him and backed him up in his fight for freedom; to the warm gush of scent that always came into the house, on a hot day, from her garden.

They parted at Charing Cross Station, which was as far as she would let him come.

"I can have you followed and find out where you live; and then I'll haunt the place," he said, miserably.

"That would not be an accident. Don't grumble. We have had our bonded day! I have been so happy that I can last now for years. I know we shall meet again. It isn't the end yet. Good-night, Ted. Good luck."

When he went into his hotel he found a message waiting from his lawyers saying the man he had particularly wished to meet over the contract had not kept that afternoon's appointment but had wired "hoping that Mr. Selwyn could name another day at his own convenience as he was anxious to have the pleasure of meeting him."

The blue eyes snapped in the sunburned face; that was as good as saying the battle was won; he'd get his terms now. By Jiminy! . . . if he'd let Dinah down he'd have hated himself all his days!

He sat down to a drink and smoke, conscious of the lively quality of the old ache at losing her. He wondered at himself; she had worn down too thin; she was no longer "his type," and yet she must be, since she could stir a feeling no other woman in all his days had done. . . .

There was a silence while I considered the man and his story. There were gaps in it, I knew. This Dinah Lee had loved him—he seemed to care a good deal about her—there must have been some obstacle . . . but that was not my affair . . . since he did not choose to tell it.

Whatever had prevented him from marrying her, or her him, had aged the woman cruelly and gouged marks of disapppointment and struggle in her character and appearance. It was exceedingly difficult to reconcile the Varmint with this figure of romance.

"What did you do then?" I asked.

"I traced you first; it was easy with that broadcast clue; then I went and cleaned up my job 'down under' and came back to England. You know the rest."

"You mean you want to meet Dinah again?"

"Yes. I have been able to make a home for her at last. It was time. And now we are bound to cross paths sooner or later. She shall have the fun of meeting me by accident once more."

He set his jaw, and I saw he was quite in earnest about my uninteresting housekeeper.

"Very well," I said feebly, "I will be as helpful as I may."

It was a most surprising story.

"I saw Dinah go to catch the Tenterden 'bus, and knew she'ld probably be away some hours so I thought I would like to tell you about it all," he said, suddenly naïve. "She is very steady in her ways, but one day she will come back at mid-night; and you'll know we've met again."

"Hasn't she any idea yet?" I asked. "You've been here some months."

"No! She has no idea, I have only seen her in the distance, once with some of your guests and to-day going off to the 'bus. I thought I would take the opportunity of explaining the position to you, and then leave our meeting as she ordains . . . on the knees of the gods."

It flashed through my mind that the man might be doing some act of conscience; anyhow it was his business, not mine.

"You are, in fact, giving me notice on behalf of Dinah?" I said, suddenly aware that the domestic problem once more rudely stared us in the face.

"Well, yes. I suppose there is something in that," he said thoughtfully

I saw him off still thoughtful, and went to peer at the fowl in the pot. I have a way of cooking an

elderly fowl which I found out for myself, and never a drop of water touches it from first to last. It steams for hours stuffed with two or three large round white onions and piled round with juicy carrots fresh pulled from the ground. When the bird is tender I put it in a brown earthenware dish with the vegetables round, and make a good thick sauce of the juice, which is delicious, being all chicken and vegetable juice; a little flour and a lot of chopped parsley soon make the sauce, which is then poured over the bird, and it all goes into the oven to glaze peacefully. It is a very simple affair, but a great favourite.

I began to wonder if I was to dine alone when the gate clicked, and up the stone path, through blue muscari, bunch primroses and golden tulip-cups came the singing child and Tods. Without Jock.

I went to the door and found a Niobe.

"O Mummy! Poor Jock!"

I took the melancholy child into my arms and looked anxiously at Tods. I wondered if the judges had made fun of our popinjay, and my wrath rose up at this man of Apple-pie Cottage who had befooled the dog and then befooled me all the afternoon, first with tales of primulinus gladioli forsooth, and then long romances about our pitiful, ugly Varmint.

"Can I have some tea?" said Tods, "I *must* have some tea."

Lesley disentangled herself from my arms sobbing vigorously.

"O! poor Tods, he must be starving. Where's Dinah?"

"She's out," I said, and bustled off to make a pot of tea. When Tod says "tea" the house stands still till he gets it. He hardly eats anything and never drinks when he does eat. So that he seems to live, practically, upon pots of tea administered at all sorts of strange times. And he has but to raise his voice to get them.

When I brought his pot in Lesley had gone to lie down.

"She has a headache because of Jock," said Tods, lapping up his tea, and looking at me oddly through his glasses.

"Well perhaps some one will tell me where Jock is and what it is all about?" I snapped.

Everything was full of emotional mysteries this sweet spring day.

"He fought, and got badly damaged. That's all," said Tods.

"*Fought!* Jock fought?" I said. "He couldn't fight! He's just a beautiful doll."

"Oh! Couldn't he?" said Tods, grimly. "You should have seen him. He was exciting a lot of attention among the Dinmont exhibitors, for your friend had dressed him up to look like all the others, when he started flirting with one of the attractive

lady-dogs, and that unusual exercise went to his head, I suppose, or the sight of so many lovely females all round about him; anyway he started growling and strutting and behaving like a he-man."

"I know! Bumptious and noisy," I said enthralled.

Tods glowered and went on.

"He got away; Lesley wasn't holding his lead very firmly I believe; anyway he got away and was nearly gnawed to death by a great Alsatian. We've left him at the vet's now. He says he may save him. But he is a game little rascal. My word, he can fight!"

"I am jolly glad he can," I said thoughtlessly, and Tods shouted with laughter.

"I knew it! I knew it! I knew your first word would be glad . . . but what a scandal to make at a dog show. You can't think what an uproar there was, and what a lot of advice was poured on the poor Lesley-child when they got her mat of blood and wool out of the Alsatian's jaws. And still growling, mark you. Poor little bloody rag."

A "bloody rag." Suddenly I saw our pepper and salt dog rushing up the lane of a morning to pay his compliment to the horrid ancient woman-dog up the hill, so gallant! I saw his liquid eyes beaming a welcome when we came home to him and that high shrill keen of delight, I saw his busy

nose sniffing at the rabbit burrows and his sensible help in clearing the garden of moles. I saw him begging for my apple-core . . . poor little Jock.

I went upstairs to the music room and found my child extended in sullen wrath.

"I heard Tods laugh. You don't care."

"I am all full of a muddle of feelings," I said remorsefully, "but the chief feeling is a dreadful pain for Jock. I feel awful. Tell me, will he get well?"

Her tears flowed afresh, but it appeared there was just a chance that the little fellow would mend; he was a very healthy dog, the vet said.

"And I must say I respect him, darling, more even than if he had come back with all the trophies of the Show."

"I don't like Shows!" she said. "I'll never take him again, even if he ever gets well and recovers his looks. O! Poor Jock!"

I heard Dinah busy about the cook-pots, and made off hurriedly to save the fowl from some of her untoward inspirations. She was quite capable of putting sherry in the sauce, and killing all that sweet of the carrot and savoury of the onion which made so delicate a flavour with the chicken taste of the broth.

Tods and I had dinner with the Varmint, who found her offerings of food rejected by the bereaved young woman upstairs.

"What happened to Dick?" I said.

"Oh! He never came; he sent a message that the tide had turned, and he has a new job and he is going to write and tell us all about it. Now I am going up to play Lesley to sleep. She has had a dreadful day, poor child."

And so it must have been dreadful. I thought about it all, while Tods played upstairs. The Trollop walked in and out of the wastepaper basket uneasily, looking for a nest it would seem. And I surveyed the acreage of canvas and mountains of wool which awaited my little hook.

For Dick and Lesley between them had got the better of me, and I was committed to the polyanthus mat.

CHAPTER XII

"The essence of all beauty, I call love,
The attribute, the evidence, and end,
The consummation to the inward sense
Of beauty apprehended from without,
I still call love."

E. B. Browning.

CHAPTER XII

THE BEAUTY DOCTOR

EARLY next morning Tods had to go back to London to conduct an orchestra, and Lesley went with him to see how Jock was getting on. I missed her. The morning walks were dull, too; I missed Jock.

Not for the first time in my days did I learn after I had lost a creature how companionable it had been. Life flows through these little bodies round our feet, making musics of emotion and of memory. . . .

I tramped alone, reflecting on the interwoven melodies running through life; wind-harps with hearts for strings . . . ; Sibo meeting me at the gate with his soft croon and upright tail, his sharp pointed ears and dazzling blue glance of welcome; the swish of the pigeons' wings, the earnest domesticity of their happiness; the toad ambling forth to rid the garden of slugs with one sharp thrilling hour of madness in his year; friends and flowers . . . all giving out a delicate music as the life-wind flows through them. And I thought of the singing of

the Only-Woman-in-the-World, how the sweet sounds made our old rafters ring with gladness, and how I hoped some children of her own would hear it, too, in the little lovely house some day . . . some day. . . . But tramping along I missed her, and I missed Jock. The prospect of day after day at the desk looked unutterably dreary without the spur of her smile to drive me to it.

I decided I would give myself a day's rest from the desk and get to work on a long-delayed job, grubbing out the unsightly stumps on the bank over the pond. At breakfast I announced this, and much to my embarrassment Dinah offered to help; there were some precious plants already installed and making headway, as well as the doomed old ash roots, and it would be just like me to get excited over the job and forget to keep an eye on her dreadful activities.

"Thank you very much," I said weakly, and soon we were all up on the bank grubbing a difficult tree stub. Tom, the postman came to lend a hand with this hard work, and he swung the axe with zeal while we tugged and pulled at smaller prey near by. Dinah was silent, her bushy eyebrows frowning darkly, but Tom waxed cheerful as we made progress with the heavy work.

"There! I've terrified it now, surely," he said gleefully, wiping his face and looking round for approval. The great ash root certainly quivered

The Flagged Path.

as the axe fell upon yellow roots, thick as a dancer's calves; his kind brown eyes beamed at the shaken stump; he didn't look very "terrible." It is a small frail body, but it carries the mark of battle. . . . Tom went through it in France.

"There is a good film to-night—'The Cobbrer!' —will you be going?"

I say I think I will—I have heard the "Cobra" is not bad; we only get a cinema show once a week, it is our great amusement in this remote and tiny village.

"Of course, you can't always depend; sometimes they say a good film's coming and then give us rubbidge; it fills the house for them. They did that over the last one, so they did. If they do it to-night I'll ask for the money back. If we all did that, it would teach 'em to be careful, wouldn't it now?"

I agree, and promise to ask for mine back if they give us anything but Rudolph.

"You would like to come, wouldn't you?" I asked the silent worker beside me; but she shook her head. I was vexed. It seemed as if she would never go outside the gates somehow; though I kept giving her chances.

"I want to get that jam finished, and I think I'll just go for a walk if you don't mind."

"All right," I said cheerfully; she might meet the apple-pie man; I wondered what she would

look like after seeing him again. Just the same I expected. A gloomy piece.

The bank was not immediately improved by our exertions. Where had been ragged ponderous stumps now were gaping holes of yellow clay in the green grass; Tom looked a bit depressed when we gave up at last, very weary, and went to the other side of the pond to survey the effect.

"Of course when we have filled those in with some rich light soil and planted lovely flowering shrubs in place of the old stumps it will all be different," I said to comfort him, and myself. It *did* look ugly!

"We might level a piece and snug a seat in under the shelter of the bank"—he said, brightening at once. His is a most willing heart.

"Yes, and run daffodils down to the water's edge; Golden Spur or Queen of the North would do there"—and so we heartened each other with pretty flower names, and left our work cheerfully held by the old magic of dreams.

Late in the day I locked up the little house, putting out the lamps, banking the log fire, and made off up moonlit lanes to the tin shack, where a gleam of the wide world waited. There was a sweet smell of wild daphne in the wind. The smell of delight.

Our tin cinema is match-boarded inside. At the far end a wrinkled sheet hangs up. In the middle

distance I could see my neighbours' maids intently regarding it. They were in the ninepennies, but I was very grand, propped against the projector's box for one and threepence.

The room filled with rough heads and shuffling feet. A girl went round with a tray of peanuts and chocolate, but the audience bought very little—they wanted the pictures, and had not the town itch for eating in theatres.

The box behind me started whirring. Here was Rudolph—poor dead Rudolph—in a love film. He was an Italian Count pursued by women, black-mailed; an unsavoury business, but the innuendoes were mostly lost. The unsophisticated audience endured patiently all it did not understand.

A business man arrived on the scene and took charge of the Count's fortunes, more women, Rudolph met a vamp, his face descended slowly upon hers; low kissing noises from the audience betrayed a momentary understanding. There were many cuts, and the story was disjointed. It was a very worn film, but they did not know that; it kept on breaking, and the patient people waited in the dark while the gentleman in the cubby hole at my back stuck it together again.

On a noble sacrifice of his "one pure love" to the high souled business man, Rudolph flickered out.

As the light went up I saw a face smiling at me; Tom's wife.

"Where's Tom?" I asked.

"He's at home, it's my turn to-night."

Terrible Tom was minding the twins.

The next film started in a farmyard with a mother pig with her baby pigs; the busy babies, their curly tails and scrambling feet, the contented, glossy black sow. . . .

There was a roar of joy. That was something the village folk could understand. Voices buzzed, necks craned. Here was the simple and the natural thing. Vamps are conventions of film life to their way of thinking, but this was of everyday, familiar, kind and homely. The piglings faded out and the farm girl went to town, absurd, unreal adventures ensued. These they watched patiently, silently.

Then came the serial—about boy scouts and a radio detective fellow, full of wireless gadgets and fisticuffs and a "black limousine." It pleased the lads of the village enormously—nothing very subtle about it, but at any rate it was not vulgar nor obscene. Each day's "good deed" was loudly applauded—the hero suffered incredible buffeting . . . and then to a very misty, well-worn picture of King George, we rose for the National Anthem and trooped off down the scented lanes, our several ways, to our ancient Kentish houses in the Weald.

A light in the dining-room dashed all my hopes of finding our Varmint out. Since this fellow was lying in wait for her, so to speak, and all our domestic

economy must be re-arranged I wished he would pounce quickly and get it over. The door was flung open in my astonished face and a rose-cheeked One beamed ardent welcome.

"Where have you been, you gadabout?"

"O! Darling, how's Jock? And when did you arrive and how did you get in?"

"Jock's getting very frisky—he's quite wonderful. I came on the London 'bus and met the Varmint, she gave me the back door key and said you were out."

"Was she alone?" I asked inquisitively.

"O! yes!" said the Miss, "of course, why?"

"Aha! That's a long story. She may not come home till midnight," I answered darkly. "Are you hungry?"

"No, I made myself an 'oamylet.' Tell me the story."

"We may not be pestered with oamylets much longer," I said, teasing because she was curious.

Dinah Lee always made us what she called "oamylets"; now we are fond of omelettes and make them in a dozen ways but always in the real, true, only fashion. We do know how to make omelettes and coffee. But Dinah beats the whites and the yolks separately and puts milk or cream in—so that we have those silly fluffy things English cooks call omelettes. And Lesley and I had to joke about it always, to keep our spirits up.

"Now, now! Don't you get secretive. Tell me the long story." So we settled down and I told the tale that Edmund Selwyn had told to me.

There was a long silence. Then,

"O dear! O dear!" said Lesley, "I hope she won't meet him to-night."

"I expect she has by now; she's quite late; why ever not?" I said.

"Well, don't you see? We must make her pretty. Voronoff her looks. Sometimes I have had a suspicion of nice dark brown eyes under all those eyebrows. She's gone mouldy with sadness. And her legs are a pretty shape I know. We could shorten her skirts."

"What, trim her up like Jock! I don't know how you'll set about it; she'll be shy or obstinate. And they may have met by now!"

But a click at the gate at that moment announced Dinah's return, and presently she came in to say she had lost her way, and wasn't the moonlight lovely, and was there anything we wanted.

"You look tired," I said. "You had better go to bed, and we'll bring you a glass of elder wine; it will make you sleep."

"O! Don't bother thank you. I shall sleep well."

"Don't you find your long skirts tire you?" said Lesley suddenly.

Dinah looked down at her heels doubtfully.

"I have sometimes thought they were a nuisance," she said, "but I did not think you would like . . ." her bushy brows questioned me.

"Oh, I prefer them short," I said heartily. "Much more sensible and neater, too. We'll soon have that put right."

"I'll help you to-morrow," said Lesley gleefully, now Jock's getting well."

The Varmint's hand on the door—a small hand —rough and red.

"Thank you very much," and she was gone.

Lesley was thrilled at this auspicious beginning of her Voronoffing.

"Mummy, I think we must give her a scent!"

That showed me the real solemnity of my singing child's view of this affair. Dinah was to be treated quite seriously.

We adore perfumes, and have made a modest little collection between us. But they are not at all cheap, and we are very precious about them.

"Which shall she use?" I said respectfully.

We thought it over. Cyclamen smells of the wild woods, a sharp fresh clean scent, it lives in a Lalique bottle, and I use it for outdoor occasions. It goes well with the sweet smells of the morning when I go walking, as clean and fresh as that. Nuit de Noel is sweet and enticing, it smells of mince-pies and spiced wines, it smells like a very good

taste. Djedi has a far off religious smell, like rather luscious expensive incense. And Origan is of course the smell of the Midi, of mimosa. Chypre is heavy with musk, a sensuous, unholy scent. Ambre Antique makes us think of the sun on the palms and waters of an oasis, of camels and hot sand and sun. The delicious Chevre-feuille was getting low in the bottle; Lesley and I bought it together in Paris by weight in a tiny funny shop of wonderful scents. We did not feel as if Dinah must have that one; it is rarely sweet and fresh, smelling like the long yellow sprays of berberis bealii which make the winter garden delicious to us, an intensified, glorified lily of the valley scent; we love it. Narcisse Noir is heavy . . . heavy . . . sweetly suffocating, a close, oppressive scent, because people will use too much, and the least spot is all that should ever be taken; Heure Bleue is a joyous happy perfume with the scent of heliotrope about it.

"That's the one she would like best," I said suddenly, remembering the story I had been told by Edmund Selwyn.

"O! Not that!" said Lesley, "it was your birthday present. The first scent you ever gave me."

"Well, heliotrope grew in his mother's garden, I gather. And I expect she would like him to remember that."

"Why not Nuit de Noel so that he can remember Christmas days in his old home?" said the minx, knowing full well I would never let Dinah Lee or anyone have a drop of that marvellous bottle she gave me for such a great surprise on the Christmas tree, when the apple boughs were burning and making bright lights sparkle on the silver cobwebs she had woven with Mitchell.

The next day I announced I would assemble a new cold frame. Lesley glanced at me over her eggs and coffee.

"Have you been idling while I was away?" she asked severely. "I see large holes on the bank. I believe you will be unbearable soon with arrears of work."

"Well, just this one day more," I pleaded, "because you are back, and I can't write when I'm all sizzling like this."

"You weren't sizzling while I was away."

"No, but I was too miserable then, and I want to get that cold frame together."

We help each other like that. When she doesn't practise her vocalises I cluck and fuss till she is driven to silence me with scales and cadenzas. And when I play too long in the garden my tyrant shepherds me back to the study; in self-defence, she says.

I was quite intractable this morning and went gaily forth.

I like my little frames that are put here and there about the garden, they are my nurseries, full of bright babies and little astonishments. I stifled all mutterings of conscience, and set out to assemble my new one; wishing for the thousandth time that Master Caxton had not wasted his time whittling wood and inventing printing. He broke the dams of reticence; he clamped fetters on the hands and feet of dreamers . . . anyway this one more day I would be free of the tyranny of writing!

Ordinary people, laymen, dull ordinary people who do not like gardens, the uninitiate, the unadventurous, the stodgy who take all that the earth offers for granted . . . hearing the word nursery-bed think of patches of little plants scattered about in odd unexpected places; usually in shady spots, sheltered and warm; cleared squares full of tiny green sparklets of growth. Or else they sweep the word into the vast world of nursery gardening where it becomes a dim shadowy shape without any particular meaning at all.

But "nursery-bed" is in fact a lovely, a sainted word; a word of work and hope, of delightful intimacies, patient fore-thought and rich reward; a romantic word . . . there it is, indeed, that "the blue begins." A cold frame makes the most useful of nursery beds.

I suppose every woman has tucked away in her mental make-up somewhere the desire to protect

and to rear up into health and strength small weak things, whether they are babies, kittens, dogs, or little flower-plants. Certainly women are almost invariably successful with the nursery-bed; in the gardens of friends who employ them I have always observed that a lady gardener has no eight hour day for her young plants. Their infantile needs are much more important to her than is the call to stop work at the stroke of the hour which seems to obsess most men. Women gardeners enjoy the garden frames with a real zest when they have once learned how to use them.

In the old pre-war days, when labour was cheap and there were plenty of men and boys to be had, frames were built on the large side; they had very heavy "lights," which needed two people to open and shut (the "light" is the lid of a garden frame, made like a window with panes of glass). Nowa-days they are built on a much more sensible plan, smaller and lighter altogether, easy enough for anybody's handling. I remember the old large frames very well and the business of lifting the lights on and off; but they had another incon-venience in that one could not reach the middle of them without difficult acrobatic feats, and much struggling and stretching.

It was exciting to find at last that makers had thought better of this heavy cumbersome business, and that one could have a small, convenient

structure which gave three times the pleasure and quite twice as good result as the others had ever done.

A cold frame is, broadly speaking, a nursery bed of fine good soil enclosed in wood, metal or brick walls; with a glass top to protect the seeds and plants within from hail, heavy rains, frost, blistering sun and tearing wind. A very delightful little room in which to bring up small plants, right under one's hand, easy to manage and extraordinarily profitable to the garden.

A new frame is to me a bit of an adventure. This was a little neat wooden one, and I wanted to mount it on bricks. That saves the walls from rotting at the base and greatly prolongs the life of the structure. It is quite a simple matter, for the bricks need not be cemented. I lay them flat end to end, the same size as the frame, which then rests on the brick run secure from the wet ground. I like to put on two or three coats of paint, also, for they help to preserve the wood. Once placed, comes the fun of filling the frame with fibrous loam, sand, mortar-rubble and wood-ash.

The time sped by while I made the emplacement and dreamed of all that cold frames can mean.

I get into the habit of treating them confidentially, as very dear and understanding friends; a cutting of a new shrub, of some plant which has a sentiment and meaning because of the place it came

from or the person who gave it, a pinch of rare seeds, a special bulb or rhizome. . . . I go to the frame full of trust, and confide the treasure to its shelter.

The frame yields up its blessing in due course, well-rooted, fine-leaved, sturdily grown, and the precious plant, or seedling, goes forth into the garden to take its destined place in the wider picture, and its share in the colour of our lives. It is not fantastic to say the cold frame becomes a lively personality in the garden; I recalled a score of tales of the way mine have befriended me—there was that matter of the veronica. A few years ago, at a garden dinner, Miss Ellen Willmott gave me a tiny piece of veronica from a bunch of rare plants about which she was speaking. In spite of some days in a tooth glass in London it came to a frame in my garden, and it rooted well; planted out in due course it grew into a lovely bush bearing fine azure, feathery flowers. I never knew its name, but everyone admired it. It was planted out fairly close to the frame where it was rooted, and for three or four years flourished splendidly.

At last one winter's frost killed it as well as nearly all my other veronica species and hybrids. It was sad to lose them, and especially that one, for it had looked particularly handsome, growing away near to the rather shabby old frame which had

nourished its infant growth. Looking over the frame months later to see how certain rose-cuttings had struck I was enchanted to find several seedling plants of my lost veronica. The faithful friendly frame had caught some blown seed, cradled fresh nurslings for the garden and brought them up as a charming surprise; just as an old hen will go off and rear a brood of chicks without letting anyone know, suddenly appearing one day at feeding time with her tribe.

I decided to put this new one where it was sheltered from the North by a high hedge, facing South in full sun. In hot spells, when shade is necessary for striking cuttings, a fibre mat could easily be laid over the glass, and a close moist warm heat secured; it is really a matter of common sense, of ordinary homely contrivance to keep the little plants moist and shaded in hot dry weather. Ventilation is very important, a free circulation of air is essential to healthy plant life, and during spells of warm fine rain I lift the lights off to gather all that benign refreshment.

When hard frosts are likely to come I find it is a good plan to pile dead leaves, or bracken or litter round the outsides; frost can easily penetrate the thin walls of wood or corrugated iron, and some external protection saves the plants inside; fibre mats or pieces of blanket or an old rug can go over the glass top. The great idea is to protect the young

things inside from suffering the extreme rigours of cold, heat and tempest.

Sibo kept coming up and mewing while I was knee-deep in thought over the pleasure and profit of a few cold frames about the place. One is enough, I was saying to myself to give endless interest in a tiny town garden—but where it is possible to have more there are advantages.

One, for instance, can be very useful if it has a cool ash bottom for the summer growth of primulas, cinerarias, etc., and another can be made of a good forcing character for early vegetables with a hot bottom of three-quarters fresh manure and one-quarter leaves. These, being mixed, are spread into a flat-topped heap, about half a foot wider than the frame all round, and very firmly trodden down so that the manure will give out its heat slowly. The frame goes on top of this, without any bricks under it, and inside the frame follows a layer of ordinary garden soil about a foot deep. The heat generated below by the fermentation of the fresh horse manure, and the sun heat caught by the glass top will bring on carrots, turnips, lettuce, radishes, etc., very quickly, and make early crops for house or market at the time of the year when they are most highly priced.

Then it is nice to have a fine frame to fill at the right time with cuttings of snapdragons and hollyhocks, lupins and other herbaceous plants which I

want to increase for next year's colour schemes. It often happens that one particular plant is of a shade I want to use extensively, and propagation from seed sowing is sure to bring along many variations, and perhaps none at all of the colour I admire; but it is an easy matter to make a stock of young plants absolutely true to tone by striking cuttings in a cold frame.

This one was a very handsome natty affair which I had bought in a lavish moment at the Ideal Home Exhibition. The wood was beautifully painted, there was nothing to do but bolt it together and mount it on the brick surround of my carefully dug emplacement and then put in the good soil.

I was hot and happy; but Sibo was a perfect nuisance. He would keep talking. Several times I patted him kindly and explained I was busy. He purred and rubbed his head against my ankles then ran off to the house; and each time came back to waste my morning with his long-winded mouse tales. I hoped it was only mice, and that he had not found a young pigeon, or the partridges nesting down there in the field below. I got bored at last, and took no notice. It is hard, I thought bitterly, to get a minute for a bit of gardening. One might think I was a criminal or something, the way everyone tries to stop me. Sibo meant to be noticed though; he came back, and sat right

in the middle of the barrow load of soil I was now sifting into the frame.

I picked him up and put him down sharply on the ground without one kind word. He gathered his toes together under him, folded them, and sat meekly. There was something resigned in the gesture. I felt uncomfortable suddenly. Animals do try to talk to us, and we are too busy or too stupid to listen to them.

"What *is* it?" I said.

He lifted his dark face and narrowed his blue eyes to long unhappy slits, laying his ears back. A queer expression.

"Aren't you well, man?" I asked and he gave a sudden loud long cry. Then he ran again toward the house, stopping presently to look back.

My sin had found me out, and I was to be sent indoors somehow, it seemed; I was not to be allowed the dear indulgence of finishing my cold frame after all. I followed the cat morosely; up went his ears and tail, he ran quicker and quicker, mewing garrulously.

At the back door I met the singing One slipping toward the stairs with a busy, secret air.

"What's the joke?" I said, but she ran past laughing, showing a pair of forceps or tweezers or whatever they call them as she went. Little silvery, dainty tweezers; I knew that pair, they live

on my dressing table. She must be after the Varmint's eyebrows . . . playing beauty doctor. But Sibo was at my ankles again, anxiously rubbing, and crying about something.

"O Come!—O Come!" he said most plainly. And I went, and there was the Trollop with four white kittens in Jock's basket. She was purring excitedly and licking her babies.

Sibo looked up at me with Tatty Bogle's own glance, his ears back, his blue eyes squinting, his back and tail fluffed out with rage. He was insanely jealous. I stooped to pat the Trollop, and Sibo shot between us spitting and snarling. Here was a to-do.

I talked to him, and he burst into fearful words, spluttering out some tale. Evidently he had had a great shock, because this time the little cat seemed quite pleased with her babies. He had come and fetched me from my work, to enlist my sympathy; I took him up in my arms and pointed out that now at last the Trollop had decent Siamese kits and was likely to be regarded with favour.

He was furious, every time I moved near her he clung to me with all his sharp claws, and chattered his mouth up and down like he does when he sees a bird, only he snarled and cursed at the same time. It was a queer sound; most intimidating. But the spoilt puss in Jock's basket paid not the slightest attention; and I took poor Sibo away

from the scene. When we got into my study and I put him down the little fellow was violently sick! He *was* upset. It took me quite a time to soothe him into some sort of philosophy. He knew they were not his kits all right, but I wondered that he should be so desperately jealous, for he was not "that kind of a cat."

I could see life was going to have some excitements in the next week or two—what with Sibo's jealousy and the Trollop's sprouting mother-love, and the Voronoffing and all.

I went to put a small screen near the blind babies to keep the light out of their eyes, though there was not much to worry about in Jock's discreetly chosen corner, and then to the kitchen for warm milk for Madam, hoping for some signs of lunch. It was long past lunch-time and I felt hungry.

But there was no one about; I waited and waited, and then found some cheese and apples for myself.

Evidently the beauty-doctoring was in full blast; and my cue was to keep quiet.

It would be just like the prima donna to be very thorough over the business. Hard to move, a slow starter, once she gets going nothing can stop her.

I rather pitied the Varmint.

CHAPTER XIII

" There's many a proud wizard in Araby and Egypt
Can read the silver writings of the stars as they run;
And many a dark gipsy, with a pheasant in his knapsack,
Has gathered more by moonshine than wiser men have won;
But *I* know a Wizardry
Can yoke a buried acorn
And whisper forests out of it, to tower against the sun."

Alfred Noyes.

CHAPTER XIII

THE WEEPING BIRCH

"THEY take so much trouble to grow that I can't possibly take too much trouble cooking them," said Dinah.

I was looking at a strange edifice on the kitchen stove; inside a very large saucepan she had made an arrangement of utensils which was more like a Heath Robinson drawing than anything I had ever seen before in my life.

"I want the sticks to cook perfectly but the heads not to touch the water—steam them you know; and I have a wonderful sauce to go with it."

It had always seemed to me to be a bit of elementary cook-meat knowledge to stand the bundles of asparagus in boiling water with their heads up out of it, in the steam. No one but an idiot would lay the bundles long ways. I was about summarily to demolish the scaffolding in the pot and explain the simpler way when I caught the Varmint's anxious eyes fixed earnestly upon her clumsy devices.

They were lovely eyes. I had never seen them properly before.

Over and under each clear, well-drawn brow was a line of red where Lesley's tweezers had roved, but that would soon pass, and the vanished thickets of coarse hair had freed a pair of warm brown eyes full of expression, kind and gentle.

"O well," I said, stopped by that anxious Martha look from pedagoguing among her pots, "it is nice of you to think of it like that. It does take a lot of time and trouble to grow fine asparagus."

And I left her to it, diabolical sauce and all. There are only two sauces for that delicious vegetable, oiled butter when it is served hot, and Hollandaise when one has it cold.

Asparagus *does* take trouble I reflected, leaving her to her passionate mismanagement of the neat thick bundles I had cut that morning. I do not care to trust everybody to cut my "grass." If a knife goes slashing carelessly about, many unseen shoots will get sliced off underground; and people are very skittish with their knives when they are let loose in a garden.

Indeed, the attitude of a large proportion of the community toward the work of the land is curiously ignorant. I have often felt that the really uneducated people are those city folk and bookwise who learn from print; and the only truly wise are those who learn from Nature how to think for themselves; and to assimilate profitably the endless surprises of her astonishing lessons.

SIBO "UNDER THE ROSE."

Four years ago we started making that asparagus bed, and I only cut our first grass last year. We opened three foot trenches early one clammy November; into the bottom of the trenches we threw hard rubbish; broken crocks, tiles, bricks, rubble, tins, old kettles and ugly useless household hard tack was thankfully dumped where it would serve to keep the future asparagus bed dry by making a conduit for heavy rains. A land drain took the water off at the end of the bed into a deep ditch, to add its mite to the field pond.

On top of all this rubbish went a very thick layer of farm-yard manure, a matter in which it is hardly possible to be too generous. Well drained, deeply trenched, and heavily enriched beds (which, in the case of our clay soil we raise half a foot above the surrounding level) will yield for many years a noble harvest of succulent stalks. A certain routine of attention is, of course, necessary, and that is not difficult, for the after cultivation is quite well-defined. Asparagus is a solid, worthy subject, not given to temperamental flights.

It consists in rich feeding and constant weeding. Many people fail with their asparagus because they give too little and take too much. It is not fair to cut hard from underfed beds. The rewards of rich manuring are well worth while when it comes to harvest. In the autumn we cut down the ferny growths and spread a good heavy dressing of manure

over all; in spring we give salt, potash or soot, and in dry spells give copious draughts of liquid manure.

The autumn manure is important to the growth of good "grass," because this plant likes to have heavy libations of full-bodied liquor washed down from above, just as Madonna lilies do. Weeding is very important, deep rooting weeds are a menace to the asparagus beds; the plants are themselves deep rooters, and need all the nourishment of the root-run for themselves. So there is a backache in every bundle of grass I bring into the house, especially after a bout of hand-picking the brown fly or beetle which lays its eggs on the precious shoots.

Thinking of all this was very disastrous, because my mind became tinctured with garden longings. I wanted intolerably to go out and see how the moss roses smelt, but sounds of industrious vocalising upstairs drove my leaden feet to the study.

Coiled round in my chair was Sibo, looking sweetly toward me, and talking in a soft murmuring about how he loved me and hated the Trollop and wanted nothing but me as long as we both should live. So I put him on my lap and he helped me to forget the garden with his fond purring.

The hours went by, the sounds of the house grew faint and far, even the song of the birds and the clang of Tom's spade close by in the border withdrew to a great distance. The singing ceased,

and the hum of a sewing machine showed that the prima donna had started shortening the Varmint's skirts, but it was all a featureless blur, I was fast bound in a deep trance—putting forth that effort of intense concentration which is writing.

They say some people write easily and quickly. To me it is a severe exhaustion—a thing to dread and flee from, and never, never escape. Because escape is death.

"We all have our cross," said Dinah at dinner-time, stroking her eyebrows; but the prima donna was not to be comforted. She wanted asparagus. We were all full of chit-chat, here was the end of the "difficult day"—the darling adventurous homely day. The hour of relaxation, of food, of com-panionship had spun round once more. The happy evening tide. I was gay because I had written my article. Dinah was moving about like something with wings just out of a chrysalis; finely arched eyebrows and slim twinkling legs made a difference to the woman, and suddenly I knew what the next thing would be. Lesley would get those lumps of dark hair shorn off her somehow. Hair is a bar-barism; a dreadful, unhygienic mass which women used to stick together with metal spikes and carry upon their long-suffering heads. Poets and old-fashioned journalists still rave about hair; but women have given up admiring whiskers.

Lesley was ill-content.

"It would not be safe I suppose?" I said doubtfully, passing a dish, the blue eyes turned mournfully away.

Lesley adores asparagus, and she has to avoid it when she is going to sing anywhere. It can paralyse the vocal cords for several hours. The life of a singer is regulated by many harsh rules, the velvet and silver of the voice have to be preserved at all costs and often by odd unexpected self-denials. The scent of heavy flowers like hyacinths, gardenias, narcissus and so on will give her a sore throat; she cannot go to one of the Westminster Flower Shows if she is going to sing that day. The exquisitely delicate membrane of the throat takes fright at the acid of strawberries; she avoids ices and lemon, and of course cocktails, liqueurs, spirits and smoking.

"Never mind!" she said, brightening up. "Look! Jock loves it."

Mounted on a chair beside her, with strange bald patches where his coat had been cut away to dress his wounds, with still something of a limp but undiminished appetite, sat our restored hero. He snuffled down the asparagus as fast as she could give it, till the Varmint took alarm and went and fetched him a banana, being cheaper and more filling.

"Dick has gone grand, and betula tristis has a new leaf," Lesley went on. "They have made him

producer of plays at the B.B.C., and he won't be able to come down nearly so often. But he likes the work."

"Did he produce *Carnival* by any chance?" I asked.

And it happened he did. I generally avoid listening to wireless plays, they are so obvious and dull, but one night, knowing the author of *Carnival*, and wondering how they would murder his book at Savoy Hill, I turned on the wireless, and listened enchanted to a marvellous transmission, in which, with delicacy and imagination, a vivid picture was painted on the ether. I had drawn a deep breath at the end, and said to myself that here at last at the B.B.C. was some spirit which had vision to grasp the possibilities of an utterly new art, someone reaching out for a new technique . . . and it was our very own Dick.

I was profoundly moved. He had hidden much of inward longing and thwarted strength from even his intimates in the days of stress and struggle. I looked back and could never remember him whining for "a chance." Yet he must often have ached to get one; because there was courage in that production, and a surety of touch. . . .

I wondered how his future would shape, and whether the Bureaucrats would succeed in tying that spirit up in red tape. . . .

"Some day my great grandchildren will sit under the shade of betula tristis," said Lesley, breaking in on my wonderings, and I had to laugh because betula is a great joke. It was at this moment half an inch high. When my box of gifts as a Fellow came from Wisley in March I read the names out as I produced each microscopic plant in turn from the little parcel of moss, and presently I held up a speck about a quarter of an inch long with a dot of green leaf at one end and said, "This is a birch tree."

"What kind?" said Lesley, "A dwarf?"

"I don't think so," I said, rummaging vainly in my mind for any tale I had ever heard of one "betula tristis"—"but it sounds melancholy. It may be a weeping sort."

"What, a real tall tree?" said the girl incredulously.

"Yes," I said, reckless directly I saw a glimmer of interest about any plant in her hard heart, "Yes! A tall forest tree, a lovely graceful species; they call birches the 'Ladies of the Wood'."

For some reason she took possession of betula from that moment; I watched her, enthralled at the sight, walk all over the garden and orchard and at last the field below trying to decide where it would grow. With every step it became more enormous in her imagination, till it seemed that seven acres would not be enough for its spreading

boughs. That speck of green in her hand was greater than the Doomsday oak at Tilford by now, greater than the big tree in Vancouver Park, greater than the greatest redwood in California.

I followed, slavishly, enchanted with her babblings, this was the beginning. . . . some day, my lassie, my heart's love would come with me into the flowery land and learn the joy of that which informs and enlightens all my days, she would come with me and enjoy the garden as I tried so very hard to enjoy her music with her. It is hard for me because my ears are tuned to the sweet frail sound of bird song and tree sound. The dubiety of the diminished seventh and honest declaration of the common chord are gross noises after these. The Slavonic whine of *Sadko*, the heavy meats of *Tannhauser*, the sugar and spice of *Traviata* are strange banqueting to this mind. I am more at home with Delius, who makes soft tangles of mutterings like the sounds in the woods at night . . . it is all very difficult, but I love her world because she leads me there; and where she goes I would follow.

I was happy, walking round our little domain with that absurd speck of a betula held so carefully, and growing so mighty.

After a weary while I had a brain wave. "Suppose you plant it in the new shrubbery below the rose garden?" I suggested. "It will be easy to trans-

plant it in a year or two when you have settled on the perfect site; and meanwhile it will be protected by the young shrubs there."

So there it went. In a wire cage, lest Jock or Sibo should tread on it by mistake.

And every day or two it was visited till at last it grew another leaf; and great was the rejoicing.

I wrote, privily, to Mr. Chittenden, the Director of Wisley, asking for information about this plant, and he could tell me no more than that it is a distinct species, a native of Kamschatka. I know that is a province or peninsula or something of N.E. Siberia, and that amber is found there in tertiary deposits.

I like amber.

I know it has a cold summer and (comparatively) warm winter—I know the Kamschadales eat lily bulbs and make clothes out of fibrous nettles, but that did not help me at all about the new kind of birch tree which had brought magic into my ancient English house.

In about thirty years I shall know more about its ways and its history in a Kent garden; thirty years are such a little while in a garden.

"Some day my great grandchildren will sit under the shade of betula tristis," said Lesley, and I looked at her, wondering.

When she has great grandchildren I shall probably not be in a fit state any more to enjoy this

lovely world. I shall have found the place my mother knows and father, whom we loved.

But first I shall have held her babes I think . . . my grandchildren . . .

The surprisingly expressive eyes of Dinah Lee were fixed on me. How much had she read in our faces all the months she had hidden her own eyes under those bulrushes? I felt like one suddenly discovered naked.

"How many leaves will it have to grow before it begins to weep?" said Lesley, and I could not really help because I do not even know why it is called "tristis" or that it will weep; but I was much too frightened to say so, lest this budding garden-love of hers should never come to flower. I had a tiresome idea somewhere that I had heard someone call the weeping sort betula alba pendula Youngii.

"Only a few," I said valiantly. "They will come along quicker once it has begun to make a start. I am going to get on with the mat and listen to *Lakmé* with you to-night."

For weeks past my singing daughter had talked of this broadcast. It was so exciting to her that I had begun to be excited myself. They do not give *Lakmé* at Covent Garden. Mr. Austin told us, when Lesley sang to him, that the British public had to be educated to appreciate it enough to demand it. And such education costs money. So

that until her voice makes her free of the world and she goes to all the lands of earth hearing music and making music wherever she goes *Lakmé* remains a great treat to her, very seldom heard.

"O dear! You are going to listen in, and I can't use the machine," said Dinah, all of a sudden fretful. "I want to do the rest of my shortening."

But Dinah's beauty was not a matter to move my girl this night.

"You can tack everything and machine it to-morrow," she said loftily, "I want to listen to *Lakmé*."

The Varmint removed her youthful legs and flashing eyes to the kitchen, where presently sounds of washing up told me her hands were at their daily roughening.

Something stirred in my heart, not pity, not admiration; but compounded of both. The yeast of her lover's tale and of the beauty doctor's efforts was working, and I began to see her without irritation; a starved woman, misused by Fate but inviolate in pride. . . .

I dragged out the heavy canvas and arranged small heaps of coloured wools upon the barren space where presently bright disks of polyanthus were designed to bloom. So far I had only done one bunch; the little hook, implement of a small patient to and fro gesture interminably repeated, lay beside them. I regarded it sorrowfully. Many and

many a mile it must travel in my hands in those tiny wheedling steps it takes arm-in-arm with a snippet of bright wool, before it would rest, and I could lay this infernal mat upon the floor by Lesley's bed. I wished Dick had not been so clever with his designing, but I could see already that it would be a very lovely hook-mat when it was finished.

Sibo went up to Jock and licked his bare patches lovingly; the prima donna stretched herself in an easy chair to concentrate with every nerve upon the interpretation. I pulled a chair to the wools, determined to like *Lakmé* whatever it cost me. All I knew of it so far was a wonderful song which the lass sings now and again, full of sounds like bells, high and clear, silver bells ringing in a crystal sky.

And suddenly I found myself savouring an old pain, when I thought of how my father would have rejoiced in wireless. How happy he would have been with us now—and yet maybe he is always with us. . . .

He was famished for music in life, away in his tiny Rectory, ministering to a few farmers and peasants. Crippled and old there was no way then of bringing the world's music out of the air into his study. He hungered and thirsted for music, and had none.

"Here's the prelude," said his grandchild. "Listen! Here is the motif of Nilakantha. All the

motifs are woven into the introduction—hark! There's mine."

"What are you?" I said.

"Lakmé! O! How I want to do it!"

I listened industriously, trying to disentangle the different patterns of noise. It was a charming idea to realise that the beginning music of an opera shows you the design of the story in its sounds. No one had ever told me that before. I had always thought it was the piece they played to settle people down in their seats and get the house quiet.

"Here she comes!" And I had to stop the hook to hear the first notes of Lakmé herself, sung in a cold clear voice. The music was full of colour, even I could hear that; there were the temple bells now, little windy bells ringing.

A running commentary from the armchair kept company with my weaving hook.

"The soprano's cold; that part there should be so warm and smooth. . . . Listen! Here's a dear wee duet! She's cold, the thing is full of *sun*."

The cold soprano must have lashed herself into a mild glow over a duet with her slave for "There! She did that nicely, didn't she?" came from the chair.

She may have. I wasn't listening. I was searching among wools and picturing my very own babe in a great opera house doing it all one day, and I shall be huddled away somewhere listening proud

and terrified. It is what she means to do. Years of toil and training have gone to that end, but sometimes in all my faith and hope in her I remember the hundreds who train and toil to the one who arrives. There are those who fall by the way. Some speck, some infinitesimal flaw on those delicate chords in the white throat and a singer is dumb.

"Let us go and gather blue lotuses by the swans."

I remembered the swans by the Waldsee in the Black Forest . . . and the blue water lilies in South Africa . . . those are nymphæa stellata, but there is another lovelier form of blue lotus in Kenya; I have never been there yet and I want to go. It is the place where one skates in a fur coat and a sun-helmet. One of the loveliest pictures I possess is that of a Kenya garden. It was painted for me in words over a fire of huge oak logs when a stranger came from a great distance to sit and describe to me her far-off garden on the mountains under the sun—Allan Quartermain's mountains.

She sat by my hearth, with gentle eyes and a ravaged face telling of her avenue of mimosa a mile long—a mile of feathery golden sprays—a mile of fragrant fountains of gold—looking on to an iris hill. It seemed that at the end of the mimosa avenue was a tall hill. She planted it with blue

irises and they bloomed in splendour twice each year. A hill of blue at the end of the gold; the picture will never leave me till I die.

"A pretty voice this contralto! The soprano does this bit well because it is a cold piece. I wonder what she will make of the market-place." I hurry back from garden dreams to find Lakmé and her slave are apparently in a boat floating down the stream and singing like anything about it.

"On the stage the end of this is often out of tune because they go behind the scenes and cannot hear the orchestra."

I listen respectfully. "It sounds all right to me!"

"O! Well, of course! It's being broadcast from the studio you see."

The hook goes flip-flop, and the music pours out into the room, I begin to like the opera, it's full of flowers anyway, rich and exciting.

"Jewels? *Jewels?*" I say testily. "Do they always have to have a jewel song in an opera? We were in a garden among blue water lilies a moment ago. Is this jewel stuff a convention then?"

"It's just a fantasy; a lovely air for the tenor . . . O! how that Spaniard used to sing it!"

What Spaniard? I had never heard of such an one—but I did not ask. I recognise that a musician's life is full of Latins, they crop up every-

where with their music and their passionate voices. The song is full of melody, a warm sweet song, and the tenor's voice is tender and rich with feeling. I wondered how the Spaniard had sung it; what he looked like.

"A lovely bit this! . . . the crushing sun on their backs . . . come and lie on the sand. . . ."

The sun! "Crushing" sun she had called it, and what did she know, yet, of the sun that she should choose such a vivid word? Some day she will travel on her voice, and sail up to Table Mountain, and then she will feel the sun. Sydney Harbour, Naples, Rio, wonderful Rio kneeling in the blue sea "with all her grandeurs leaning on her white sea-marges and her long leagues of snowy surf and silvery sands." Some day Lesley will know the sun, and enjoy her music more because of it, as I have enjoyed gardens beneath it.

I forgot Lakmé, and was transported again to those parched lands where succulents enjoy life to the full; most interesting little wretches many of them with their queer furtive ways of disguising themselves so that they look like pebbles, or small animals, and then they suddenly burst brilliantly into incontinent bloom! There are gardeners who make a speciality of succulents. I recall one with infinite pleasure on a kopje in the prettiest suburb of Johannesburg, where I pottered

happily through a long hot day with him among his astonishing pets. But the succulent garden with its cacti, its aloes, its diversified mesembryanthemums, its stapelias, opuntias, agaves, cereus, cotyledons, echeverias, and sedums, is not for everyone; these are intimates over which the crack-brain pores, lost in wonder; they do not catch the emotions or stir the senses, or inspire the poet to rapture as the simpler flowers do.

Ask any Australian garden lover what plant will make him homesick for the hot and arid plains, the dim blue reaches of gum-bush and the blazing avenues of scarlet flowering eucalyptus leading to the homestead, homesick for the merry face of the little tree-bear or the clear gong-note of the bell-bird and the rollicking laughter of the Kookoo-burras at dawn, and he will say in a drooping voice, homesick at once—"Baronia." There is that about the intense sweet fragrance of the homely little brown and yellow flower baronia which takes every Australian by the throat and wrings him with thought of home as soon as he sniffs at it.

Truly, there is something more in this garden-making business than shows on the surface; those men and women who have grown up in the company of certain flowers, and have grown to associate their colours and their fragrance with the memory of home, have had woven into the tissue of their

consciousness a sweet influence which will move, and may even direct them, all their days.

I found myself tugged violently back to Kent and the wool mat, by comments from the arm-chair.

"The call was splendid. But why didn't she sing that phrase staccato? It's no use having all that nimbleness and lightness, that purity of tone without warmth and passion, too. I want to sing *Lakmé*—I want to sing as I feel it can be sung. Shall I ever be able to?"

I went on struggling with wool. I do not know how to do it for her. I really do not know how to take an opera house up in my two hands and give it to her to go and sing *Lakmé* in. I would if I knew how.

These musicians want such a lot . . . training first, years of it . . . and music . . . sheets and books and scores of books of music; and then places to keep them all. Pianos and large rooms to put them in, then accompanists; and then opera houses and orchestras and all. Writers only want a pencil and some paper—much simpler. I shook out the wools grumpily—here she was wanting to sing *Lakmé*, and I could only make a warm mat for her feet. . . .

A terrible scrimmage under the table sent everything else out of our heads, snarlings and spittings and Jock barking from a safe distance; my chair

upset, and the mat and all the wools too. The orchestra burst at this moment into the loud processional march of the goddess Dourga.

Dinah came running in to see what the din was all about, and Jock, mistaking her unfamiliar legs for those of an enemy, flew at her in a frenzy. The poor Varmint fell in a heap among the chair legs and the wools, calling to Jock in a friendly frightened way, Lesley was under the table doing something or other; in a moment all the peaceful room was a cauldron of struggling bodies and awful noises.

I ran to the wireless knob and turned it off, and the sudden cessation of the loud orchestration was like magic. Jock started licking the face of his fallen foe, discovering a familiar friend, Lesley uprose with a pair of astonished blue eyes staring out of her arms where the affronted Trollop trembled, with dishevelled fur and ears flattened back.

I helped Dinah up, all hot and surprised and covered with wool, still telling Jock he was a "good dog"; and under the table growling, implacable, furious, sat jealous Sibo with four bits of fur round him. My heart sank into my very boots. I felt sick . . . four little very still bits of fur. . . .

"What happened?" I said faintly.

"It's the Trollop," said Lesley. "She jumped through the window with these and Sibo went for her."

"It's four," I said, "she couldn't carry four at once."

But when we looked again we saw it was four rabbit's legs not four little kittens which were scattered there.

"She was taking them to her babies," said Dinah in an awe-stricken voice. She could never get used to the wisdoms of our cats—and this mother-wisdom especially seemed to stir her almost to tears every time she saw a fresh sign of it.

"Poor pussy! Why did Sibo hurt her so?"

"He is jealous," I said, "he hates her to do anything for them. It's awful the way he feels."

"Yes, but how did she be so clever about it all?" said Dinah, still spellbound. "How did she count four. She has got one leg for each kitten, and they are so equal in size. Look!"

Laying them out side by side we saw indeed that this mother would have no favouritism among her brood; the bunny legs were neatly chewed off to a size, nice little joints for tiny jaws and claws. The thoughtful Trollop!

"She must have had a lot of fun getting those ready to bring in," said Lesley stroking the cat in her arms. "Like getting presents for children's birthdays. How surprised she must have been when she had bunched them up so cleverly to bring in all at once, and jumped straight into a jealous man's claws."

"You take her up to the babies with her present," I said, seeing emotional signs in my Sibo, growling and shuddering under the table.

"And, Dinah, you take Jock out for his little run, while I calm Sibo . . . he will know you have forgiven him then, if you take him."

And so, presently, I had the beloved on my lap in a silent room, while his nerves grew quiet and his shuddering stopped under my stroking hand.

The threatened catastrophe was averted; instead of being sick he sat and talked and talked in a small weak, complaining mumble about the way that woman upset him. And I promised him on my solemn word of honour, that the minute her offensive children were strong and lusty, safe to send away, they should go—all four of them.

"And then she'll do it all over again," I warned. And Tatty heaved himself up with a sigh, putting his arms round my neck for the first time in this incarnation just as Tatty Bogle* used to do. . . . My Tatty-come-back. . . .

"Mummy!" an excited voice came whispering into the room.

"Mummy! While I was upstairs I heard Jock barking his delighted-to-see-you bark, and I looked out of the window, and I saw a man and woman

* See "Garden of Experience."

together, with Jock leaping round. She has met him!"

I could picture the small rough hands held fast. . . .

"She has come to the end of a very lonely road, darling."

"And then they walked away, and she went as if there were gold wings on her feet. Now we'll hear some more *Lakmé*."

I kept Tatty-come-back on my lap, and sat quite still with the fallen mat still on the ground under mountains of wool. I had an idea.

"I think you and Dick might like to make that mat for a wedding present," I said. "It will look handsome in Apple-pie Cottage, and it will be a more graceful gift than buying something ready-made!"

CHAPTER XIV

"For out of love and seeing
Beauty herself has being,
Beauty our queen;
Who with calm spirit guards us
And with dear love rewards us
In courts for ever green."

John Masefield.

CHAPTER XIV

COURTS FOR EVER GREEN

WE were assembling for a party. And it was my fault everyone was late because my present had had a bath and was not yet quite dry. We were going to lay gifts, gold and frankincense and myrrh at a cradle. A baby Varmint. A nice little Mr. Varmint with dark eyes which he rolls fondly. His eyebrows are not very bushy: yet.

We had all made the visit an excuse for offerings because now at last, and only at this long last, had Dick and Lesley finished that mat; I had to help them at the end. I never did really escape the thing in spite of all my craftiness. I do not think Dick will be so ready with his designs again; anyway he is too busy nowadays with his larger works in the great world, where they do not call him Dick, as we do.

Tods had written a soothing lullaby and called it "Apple-pie Dreams." It was all done up in a neat, tight little roll like a stick; he wrote it one day in a burst of inspiration, and dedicated it to

the Weeny One sucking his tiny thumbs in a cradle at Apple-pie Cottage where a man and a woman who had nearly missed the way to the land of Wonder looked down on him. Edmund Selwyn has quaint names for his wife . . . Dove-in-the-wood he calls her, and Honey-balm, and Harvest-home and Cherry-pie. She answers them all, a surprised, obedient woman.

The spinner of cobwebs carried a croûte of paté-de-foie gras. It seemed an odd present to take to a cradle, but he had not any experience of nurseries to guide him, we supposed. He and his only brother are very nearly of an age, and he imagines that what pleases them would be pleasing to any man, at any age. It was a lordly gift, anyway.

Dick and Lesley were quarrelling over the mat as we set off; my gift having been voted dry at last. It was a Jockleen. A nice young lady Dandy Dinmont, which Jock followed wherever she went in a state of besotted admiration. I had always heard babies and puppies are good companions, most devoted. And it had lain rather heavy on my conscience that I had not given Jock a wife. I had slight misgivings now and again as I saw Jock's devotion, but Lesley said he was far too fond of us to stray after any strange gods.

A twinge suggested to me that perhaps it is we who are the strange gods. . . .

THE DREAM SEAT.

"It's too heavy for you. I can carry it," snapped Dick, "and you said we'd go halves, partner, in this present, didn't you?"

"I want to help carry it. I helped to make the beastly thing, didn't I?" says Lesley.

"Well, why have you got another parcel there?" asked Dick.

She was hugging a small brown parcel with a contented air.

"This is only a small female gift from one woman to another. You couldn't have helped with this."

I knew what it was. A piece of Lesley's finest sewing. She learned to sew long, long ago under the quiet eyes of Reverend Mother at a convent. and when she likes she can do very nice needlework. A little "short" frock of cambric and lace for the baby. Strangely my heart had contracted to see her about that sweet work—remembering my ardent bunglings for her so long ago in the desolate days.

Sibo came mewing out of the hedge to greet us as we passed by; close behind him followed the Trollop, sleek and vociferous once more. Much too vociferous. I looked sorrowfully at my dear Tatty-puss, licking the face of his unfaithful friend, as he shrilled us his complaining farewells. His calamity was once more adumbrated; this hunting companion of the dawns and good comrade of the dusk would be transformed again into the woman

who is to him an abomination. I called him a loving word, and he listened, with uplifted tail and arched back; he will have me to fall back on when the wanton upsets him.

"That yew-tree by the gate has grown a top-knot and spoilt its shape," said Mitchell, the spinner of cobwebs.

The times I have meant to take that bulge off the yew-tree! I did not know anyone would ever notice such a little thing but me;—it aggravates me.

"I could tidy that up for you in no time if I had a ladder and a saw," said the bearer of rich gifts.

He became on the instant exceedingly popular. I hurried the pup along so as to join his long strides and tell him that both were his at any moment; but Tods was vexed.

"You need not be so uppy because you are a bag of bones nowadays," he grumbled, "tearing off like that, dragging the poor pup's neck off."

Dick and Lesley were getting blown carrying their heavy parcel up the hill.

"Yes. Let's give the little girl a rest!" they said, suddenly very thoughtful.

We all stood looking at the soft, floppy-pawed bride-designate; a pretty rascal with a long pedigree carefully chosen to chime well with Jock's.

Across the Weald came smells of young green upon the pastures. This is a fair land, this land

of Kent, where "dear love rewards us, in Courts for ever green" . . . the land Lewis Hind roamed in life, writing his delicate essays about it—the dear familiar of our garden whom still we sorely miss.

Looking down on the pink-tongued pup I remember the dog he had once. It was during the War, when we lived in Surrey among the pines and heather. Hetty had to go to America, and she left her man in my care. He lived with us for a year, until he sailed away through the submarine-haunted seas to join her in New York. Few people except his intimates knew the maimed body that brave man bore; never a day might pass but he was reminded that he was not any more like other humans, and could not lead a normal life. But so gaily did he carry himself that hardly any guessed.

When Hetty went away Lewis was lonely for something of his very own; he asked if I would mind if he had an old English sheep-dog pup. And so he got one and called it Hobby.

He brushed and groomed and fed Hobby daily with the utmost regularity. One day we went for a picnic to the Pride of the Valley several miles away. Lewis had a bicycle as it was rather far for him to walk, for nobody had a pleasure car those stricken war days. We got home late, after a long day in the sun just as a thunderstorm started,

expecting to find Lewis and Hobby back long before us. It was hours before they did come home, and I was dreadfully anxious. My poor friend arrived after midnight, having lost his way in the storm amid the sandy commons, he was drenched and exhausted, wheeling his bicycle, with Hobby on the saddle!

"He got so tired I could not ride," he said.

Well! They pass on . . . the dear ones. . . .

Here was Apple-pie Cottage lying warm and snug in the May sunshine, a rapture of sound from every thicket. The throats of the birds "singing the joy of their eyes" . . . songs full of glee sweet as honeysuckle.

Here were the daffodils come again blowing trumpets of fairyland; frilled trumpets of living gold calling us back to elf-land, to the place where we belong . . . out of the common world of noise and worry, of urgent machinery, of water rates, and coal bills, overdrafts, and the insatiable income-tax fellow.

Here is the land of faëry, sanctuary from the mammoth towns with their bricks and mortar, repression, ugliness and drudgery. Here is Beauty.

Here are starry daffodils, flowers of ivory crowned with flame; milk-white flowers crowned with gold; rich self yellows, sulphur perianths; crowns shaped like saucers wide and smooth, or closely quilled down the perianth tube to a sort of hexagonal

diadem made in dreams for the brows of a Princess of the Little People.

The Selwyns have made a collection of choice varieties; Ted's idea, for he is selective; but Dinah has her own part of the garden where she grows vast quantities of everything which suits her notion of a picking garden. She likes to have flowers in every room; and to shower bunches upon everybody who will carry them away; she likes to pack boxes to send to city-bound wretches and hospitals; and I enjoy Dinah's garden exceedingly, the untidy, generous place, full of sweet scents and amiable intentions; it is peculiar and seemly and like her.

There are in the world all kinds of gardens; formal gardens, wild gardens, old world gardens, rock gardens, nursery gardens, water gardens . . . their name is legion, but Dinah's is one of the nicest, for of all the gestures we humans use to express feeling toward each other the sweetest is that we make with flowers.

The eloquent dumb word passes, more delicately than speech, from one to another. With flowers we seal our friendships, utter our welcome, say farewell, heal our quarrels, speak our sympathy with the glad and with the sad.

A picking garden is much easier to plant than it sounds. Dinah relies upon an intelligent choice of those plants which have a good heart under the scissors—sweet peas, for example, and forgoes

certain others like hollyhocks which she says are really a garden decoration, not flowers to "cut and come again," or lupins, which are glorious in the borders but do not keep their blooms indoors. She will not grow stocks, mignonette or wall-flowers either, for she declares that they are none of them suitable flowers to grow for indoors, as anyone who has a keen sense of smell will agree when they have found themselves in a room with vases of these rank subjects.

She has abundance of polyanthus, daffodils, grape-hyacinths, marguerites, shirley poppies, clarkia, sweet peas, roses, gypsophila, statice, miniature sun-flowers, michaelmas daisies, asters, zinnias, mari-golds, scabious, snapdragon, coreopsis, the slender many-coloured primulinus gladioli, lilies of the valley, violets, pansies, pinks, ladslove and lavender. They make her a medley of sweet scents and bright colours; lovely when growing in the garden and sweet to pick for the house.

Hers is really a giving garden, which loves to grow for sharing its sweetness. It is big enough for her to manage but is, whatever its size, much smaller than the heart which planned it!

While she likes to plant the bulbs in large scapes under trees on the lawns or orchard, buying the older varieties for the sake of cheapness, Ted pre-ferred to have pet clumps of the choicer varieties in special places. Here was a mass of brilliant

gold, a whole army of trumpets of the richest metal, heavily scented; here was the white majesty of Tenedos and there the dazzling delicacy of St. Dorothea, here the clean bred lines of that aristocrat Slieve Donard which grows so strong and fine under the mountain that gives it its name; Stateliness was heavy in bud; it is a late blooming giant Leedsii and this being a very late spring the pale warm peachy crown of the big striking daffodil was still withheld.

Spanish Flag was just unfurling its blazonry of yellow and red, and here gloomed Mystic with an apple-green eye rimmed with orange in a glistening white perianth; over there shone the sophisticated candours of Mitylene, and here Raeburn the lovely Poet, with an eye like a wonderful bit of lacquer in the exquisite snow-white of the perfumed flower.

In a very special place by the dining-room window Lesley Dudley opened her brilliant flaming heart in a shapely saucer-shaped perianth the colour of old ivory; of all the treasures of narcissi in the garden Ted said none had been more often visited than that fine clump where the Singing Daughter grows in flower-flesh under the name by which she chooses to be known in the singing world, my father's name,—there has been music in Dudley throats through all the centuries.

I lingered by the gate a moment, looking round happily. Teddy and Dinah are making a nice

home, a real one, for they can hear the little voices. Dumb things . . . flowers and birds and beasts speak to them in the worldless language. The wind-harps blow; there is harmony around them, and they have the sense to make their commerce out of the things they like, the things which interest them.

Below the old cottage, in their heavy fibrous loam, grow the peonies which they cut in ever-increasing sheaves for selling by post to a private and very appreciative clientele; people of sense who know how long these flowers will remain fresh in water opening to the very last bud and exhaling their curious, characteristic, fresh sweet perfume.

One needs to have met that fragrance blown in the open air from a lordly planting like this to know the great lure of peony-passion; the rich sweetness of them on a pretty day when the sky is full of white cloud-galleons and the sunlight dances on the great heads of satin in their ranging colours makes a memory so full and satisfying that I wonder why people do not plant more peonies and more—and ever more!

Perhaps it is because they need patience at first; but then what is there in life worth having that does not ask of us patience? Peonies take a year or two to become established, they dislike being moved intensely, but once they have taken hold they grow generously.

In spring the thrusting carmine of thimble points above the soil grows quickly into handsome masses of bronze and copper leaves, shining richly as the sun comes through; the fat bloom-buds swell, and then through May and June opens the glorious peony harvest; there are single and double forms in every shape and shade, cups of shell-pink filled with a creamy tangle, huge perfumed balls of satin petals incurved like great chrysanthemums; flat water-lily saucers of waxen white crowded with gold; bundles of cream and rose baby-ribbon petals, as dainty as a sea-anemone, sumptuous chalices of lacquered red, and big red mops coarse and good-hearted, the hoydens of the genus.

As the plants grow bigger year by year the yield of bloom becomes greater, so that at last one can fill the house with the exquisite flowers. And then, after the last bloom has opened and we realise regretfully that the peonies are past for another year, when they are so nearly forgotten in the pleasure of the roses and the pond lilies that they take on the unsubstantial quality of a dream, suddenly they come back to the garden dressed in another beauty, the rich livery of autumn foliage. Once more the house is full of colour from the peony plants—jars and bowls of their umber and orange, russet and purple, and golden leaves make a warm welcoming decoration, beautiful in the autumnal firelight, especially if the waxen

snowberry bushes will yield a few sprays to go with them.

Below the peony land is a large pigeon establishment, where the enterprising couple grow squabs on a much larger scale than Lesley and I do in our singing-writing life. We only grow for our own table but they supply two or three clubs in London and have hundreds and hundreds of busy pairs of handsome birds, crooning in their soft gurgling voices day in and out.

Ted is watching them closely and selecting the largest breasted birds and the most industrious breeders for his stock, so that in time no doubt he will have a famous squab farm capable of supplying the choicest birds all the year round both for other breeders and for table purposes.

I remember the night he dined with us first—when Lesley and I shooed off Dinah for a whole day to go and spend it with her lover, and we prepared a small fête to celebrate their betrothal.

We gave them roast squabs and "oamylet" Espagnole; and sparkling Saumur to drink, with a whole fresh fragrant peach in each glass that had been pricked all over so that it and the wine became each full of the other. And for dessert were the peaches. It was a nice little feast, except that Dinah was too moon-struck to know what she was eating.

The keen, blue-eyed man appreciated everything

and especially the squabs. He asked a great many questions, and then said he would like to keep our kind of table birds and do the thing properly, which pleased me; for I have often wondered why we import at such expense the Bordeaux pigeons when we can so easily raise them for ourselves in England.

His puzzled attentive glance kept travelling back to Dinah as he talked; he could see she was in some way much younger and prettier looking. . . . I expect he thought it was all his doing.

They have bees, too, at Apple-pie Cottage. Not as a commercial proposition but just a few hives to supply them and their friends with honey. I think they like to watch the mysteries of that perfect communal life and to share it as far as humans may; they like to take a tithe of its golden harvest, having helped to earn it by helping the bees to find their honey.

They say that it is quite a fair thing to take the surplus store, provided that the hives are never starved; that they are kept warm and dry during the winter rain and frost; and that sugar and pollen are given during the crucial times of the season.

Some of the nectar-bearing flowers give the tidy gardener a shock; nettles and common charlock are as dear to the bees as the palms which they love to visit in early spring. Fruit blossom is a rich

larder for the hives, and bees in return "set" the fruit; so that the garden which grows some fruit trees and keeps a hive or two practises a wise economy.

I like to watch Dinah's bees when they come over the hill in Spring to visit my crocuses and grape-hyacinths; the little busy bodies singing so happily, enjoy blundering about in a garden which grows bermagot and balm, and rosemary and thyme. Nearly all the flowers of herbs are honey-bearers; no one who has once tasted it can forget the flavour of that honey which is gathered from wild sage on the Italian hills, or that rarer and more wonderful honey of Hymettus from the hills of Greece, where are carpets of wild thyme.

Certain flowers give a very unpleasant taste to the combs; privet is one; fortunately most privet is kept clipped so close that but little bloom appears, but where it has been allowed to grow at its own sweet will, and cover itself with its tight creamy heads of rank-smelling blossoms, every neighbouring hive will tell a sorry tale afterwards in the spoiled taste of the honey sections.

Peppermint is another flower which makes a nasty flavour, but no one can have too many bluebells, or wind-flowers, or soft lady-pussies round the garden to make the famous "willow honey." The male pussy-willow only gives pollen, it is the soberer lady-willow which yields a sweet nectar; and,

strangely enough, among all the riches of their charm, the very flowers of the spring—the primroses have no sweetness to give the honey-bee!

At the very end of the summer ivy blossoms open, and they have in their cups some wild despairing sweetness which makes the bees and butterflies drunk—they never seem able to resist the lure of that farewell feast of the year; and they crowd about it with an eagerness which looks as if they were aware in their little velvet bodies of the bitterness of approaching winter.

They were all working away among Dinah's flowers now as gay as if work itself were Paradise; my party came straggling through the gate, Tods banging Jockleen on the head with his lullaby because she would philander with Jock and get herself tied up in her lead; Dick and Lesley followed very hot and bothered with their offering, and the croûte was borne carefully in the rear.

"It's really an ideal present for a baby," said Dick later on having laid the mat by the cradle; stamping on it proudly. On the dark polished oak floor the colours shone up with a great effect, the pile was very deep—each stitch faithfully knotted into the canvas. It had taken a long time to make, but it would wear for generations, and it certainly had a rich splendour of colour.

"O! It has really been finished at last?" said the Varmint clasping her hands, with shining eyes.

The great oval of daring colour so skilfully blended thrown down on the floor had an effect on the whole room, it enhanced and enriched everything, striking a note of luxurious harmony. We all stared at it, surprised and pleased.

"It's Dick's design. He made it. He put everything in, like he did in his curry!" said Lesley mischievously.

Dick's curry! My mind swims back to Mabel Lygon's wedding feast * when no one had anything to eat because we believed Dick when he made word pictures of a most transcendental curry. Mabel and Murray are in the South Sea Islands now, wandering the world in search of moths and grubs and pupa-cases, They wedded here and went wandering, but Edmund Selwyn came home from wandering to make his nest in the Mother-Isle. Like a nightingale.

"Here is a watch-dog for Tedling!" I said, and brought in the pup with an air, to catch a shrewd glance from a pair of keen blue eyes.

"It's a lady Jock!" I went on.

"How lovely!" said Dinah. "We can have lots of little Jocks," and the man's eyes turned from quizzing me to rest on his wife with that look to which I have now grown accustomed, but which when first I saw it was like a blow in its sudden illumination. A look most eloquent. It told me

* See "The Joy of the Ground."

that he had spoken truly when he said our Varmint was to him the most desired and rarest creature he had ever known.

He loved her.

Dinah and Lesley were bending over the beautiful sewing of the little dress, talking softly. They did not see that brooding glance, come and gone in a flash. But Tods did. He sees everything out of those grey eyes in his white face.

Presently he went to the piano and played his lullaby. That woke the little Varmint and it cried.

CHAPTER XV

. . . "on the night that I bore Thee,
What didst Thou care for a love beyond mine or a heaven
that was not my arm?
Didst Thou push from the nipple, O Child, to hear the
angels adore Thee?
When we two lay in the breath of the kine?"

Rudyard Kipling.

CHAPTER XV

THE DREAM BENCH

TODS and I sit on the dream-bench together. A nightingale near by pours his song over the shadowed grass; sweet cool smells come up from the still water by the pool where float ivory cups and jade. His dark head rests against my arm, his hand in mine, we sit there silent; plunged in dreams; tired musician and tired writer content before the beauty of the Weald.

My mind keeps picturing Dinah again as I saw her this afternoon—absorbed, fulfilled, radiant. I see Ted, masterful, standing before his hearth on the fine new mat with legs apart, looking down on his woman and his babe with that look of a peace complete because it remembered the pain of the ravaged years behind.

I see my singing daughter, warm and tender, take the little fellow on her lap; and I feel again the passionate physical longing for a babe of hers upon my knee; a sudden stabbing desire which rose up and hit me, all unprepared for this emotional milestone.

That business of having babies! So many women evade it nowadays; scoff and are wiser than we who have borne. But what is there worth while in life, what worth living for, but love? And the sweetest and best of all is the love we find at home.

Dinah is blessed among women. By the cradle she dreams her long dreams; and, in the school-room with her youngsters (for Dinah likes a lot of everything!) she will meet once more the fantasies of youth. Privilege and power are hers; life has divulged a sacred trust. Love has widened its borders, showing new heights and depths, greater than place, before fame and before money; it is suffering, endurance, and sacrifice; it is loyalty, it is faith; it is vital, strong, terrible.

She will learn, at last, it is that which we give which is love and not that which we take. The young adorables, pretty as dawn and sweetly appealing, will need constant care, and ceaseless sacrifice of time and money for their health, their clothes, their education.

The joy of parenthood will shape itself into an eternal service; all her strength and her time will be spent finding the wherewithal to stay the clamours of these insatiable fledglings; she will grumble and feel the strain, and enjoy it; she will grow used to being wanted. Giving up will become second nature, tasting the keen happiness of sacrifice she will hug the hair shirt; her children's welfare will come

From the Dream Seat we look across the Weald.

before any other thing; she will live "all out," spending strength, courage, hope, to the uttermost. The cradled torments will grow deliciously . . . knee-high, elbow-high . . . shoulder-high . . . to her they will be the uprising and the going down of the sun.

Happy Dinah! Basking in their affection, finding more and more happiness in their companionship.

As the years spin along the load of financial responsibility will grow heavier; but she and Ted will have grown used to the dear burden; luxuriating in sacrificial fervours they will not spy the greater sacrifice ahead.

Those girls and boys of theirs will do as their parents bid, their lives will be shaped under the "governor's" guidance. The springs of parent-pride are deep-seated, and flow constantly and strong—pride in this charming hoydenish athletic girl, this active, disconcerting, delightful boy! The years will enrich their content; and then suddenly the children who have been so fair and dear, who were so docile under ruling, will turn with strange moods and sudden mutinies; they will puzzle and confound the astonished Ted and Dinah; for the emotional milestones always find us astonished, unprepared.

They will exert authority and issue orders, their children's good still their darling only wish, to be

secured at all costs. They will grow severe and their babes will grow difficult. Till, in a blinding moment, the greatest test of life will be upon them; Ted and Dinah will realise that the home made for them has become to these young wild hearts a prison. They will only want one thing from those who have given all, and that is freedom from their givings. They will not need the Varmint any more.

Their bodies strong, their souls fortified with wisdom, they must prove themselves; prove her mother-worth; they must go forth to pit their wisdom and test their strength in the marts of the world; they will need adventure and struggle, they will wish to win and lose and fight again. They will want to shed the old chains.

And Ted and Dinah will be the old chains.

In all the warnings of elders at marriage people are never warned of this dreadful day, nor of the deadly seed of selfishness that they may discover within themselves when they try to keep their children still enchained.

Home is sanctuary. When it becomes a prison it ceases to be home. If Dinah opens her doors and speeds her children forth they may come back in a time of need and bless her once more with her old privilege of giving. It will be her only chance. She will have to hide her stricken pride; and the

desolation of the empty days, the aching pain of loss.

Poor Varmint, poor Dinah, abundant giver! But the dross of the flesh will be burned away in that fierce flame and what is gold of the heart left. In time the knowledge will come to her that the way to keep pure love within her heart, a living Incorruptible, is to wait until she is wanted again.

And, if she is never wanted, to pass on without grumbling knowing that her faithful patience was love also . . . and God is love; and that she has walked with Him.

Tods lifts his head sleepily and stares at the stars.

"The best chunes I make are in the moving clouds?" he whispers, his thin face turned up, the frail body that holds a strong heart snug against my arm.

"The best books I write are in the passing winds; the best part of us never comes to expression . . . we pass . . . we pass!" I murmur back.

Tatty comes running up the steps, slipping through star-light and shadow as life itself slips through day and night. He chirrups remarks as he runs along. So pleased to find us.

Tods strokes my hand, placidly, rhythmically. As people stroke a cat.

"Will others breathe these airs of Kent that once were yours?"

"My great grandchildren will," I say, wriggling uncomfortably.

I am not keen on dying. There is so much to do.

THE END

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